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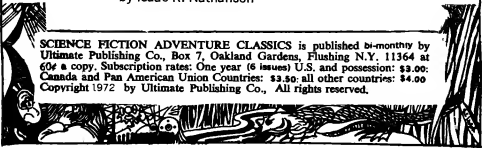
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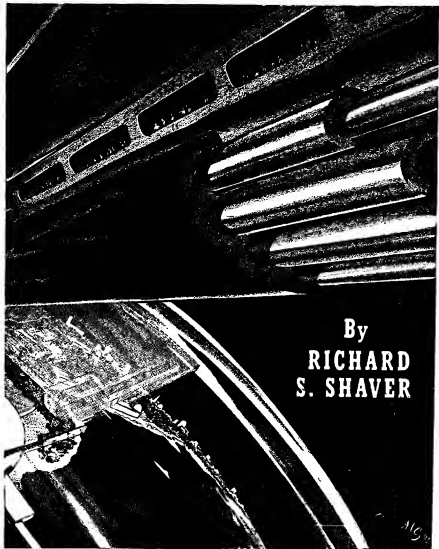
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INVASION OF THE MICRO-MEN



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Out of this tramp ship from space came the most awful menace ancient Nor had ever faced—and Mutan Mion faced a supreme test



By
**RICHARD
S. SHAVER**

I MUTAN MION, of the Space Cadet Corps of the Nortan Space Navy, on leave from the Dread-Nor *Wardark* had been long absent. I

dressed with care. The black and glittering scales of my uniform I laced about my legs with careful attention. About my shoulders I threw the golden

cape of a fledgling of the Space Corps. I stood before the mirror for a last admiring glance at the glory that was me, to me. In my hand I held a new portable thought augmentor with which to show my friends my truly glad thoughts at meeting them once more. For my beloved mate, Arl, too, there were a number of mental images I hoped particularly she would note, for it had been a weary, long time away from her. As for Vanue, my mind craved her strong reassuring logic complimenting my conduct in the trying period of adjustment I had been through. She had become a staff of my life, and I walked not well without her.

I was now a member of the great Nor Cadet Corps, from which training I would be allowed to select several future careers—the Space Navy of Nor; the Nor-patrol; the Technician; or the Engineer, which selection would be controlled both by my natural aptitudes and by the selections of my nearest friends within the organizations.

As I sped down the ways in a hired rollat past the great ramps of the interplan commerce locks, where ships from a thousand far-flung planets lay waiting cargo and inspection of official papers, I noticed with curiosity a particularly villainous looking ship. An ancient patched-up wreck she was, and about her a crew of caricatures such as I had not seen since I left the dero of earth behind me.

They were clad in filthy rags; they were misshapen and evil of aspect. Some were horned and four or six armed. There were evidences of both Titan and Variform blood, but the predominant strain was one strange to me. Their legs were hairy and bowed, their backs humped and overly broad for their height. Their faces were distinguished chiefly by a nose that spread over most of its surface, their ears stuck

out like sails, and all were alike in their careless, distressed appearance.

I asked my driver who these tramps might be, and how it was such an evil looking outfit had been allowed to enter the great port.

"They are Jotuns," he answered, "newly arrived. They come every year or so to buy our junk—worn-out machines, which they rebuild, space-ships no longer serviceable for sane men, and stimulative mechanisms which no one but they would use, even if rebuilt. They are dwellers in abandoned caverns on planets which have been avoided for one reason or another on the rims of the Nor government's influence in space.

"There are a lot of them, and few of their cities are even on the maps. They are an evil lot, but tolerated for certain reasons, such as information the Service gets from them about the lawless frontiers. They learn things no one else could, you see. But if I had my way, they would not be allowed within a dozen light years of Nor. They deal in many forbidden things—slaves, illegal drugs, and worse. If Nor had an enemy, the Jotuns would be the first to be used as spies upon us."

AS WE passed the ancient encrusted bulk and the motley mob of people clustered about it—a curious sense of foreboding touched me with a finger of cold. Had not Nor learned its lesson with ignorant dero? Didn't they yet know a dero when they saw one? There was an ominous something about their presence; what it was I could not quite put my finger on. Would that a man could learn ever to listen to such hunches—he would forestall many a disaster.

But thoughts of such an unpleasant nature had small room in my mind tonight. I was on my way to Vanue's

great home. This was my first leave since my induction into the great Cadet Corps, my first step toward my goal, the Nor-patrol. It was the first time I had stepped from the *Wardark*, on which my training had begun. The anticipation of seeing Arl and the laughing faces of the lively Nor-maids who served Vanue left little thought for the tracing down of vague and baseless forebodings. Besides, it was idiotic to think the things called Jotuns would be able to pull anything dangerous under the vigilant eyes that watched over all the rich and happy life that was Nor.

Such is overconfidence, and one contracted it from every Nortan mind, for it was true that Nortan strength and Nortan war-tech was superior to any other we knew of in all space—save only the greater cities of the Elder planets, so far away and so much larger that the inhabitants had no use for our small worlds. We were blind with an overwhelming confidence in the vastness of our superiority over other life in all the many worlds we touched with our vast empire's power.

THE lilies of Nor are beautiful enough during their everyday occupations, but when they preen for a social affair and the air gets heavy with augmentive conductor electric, so that the sweet essence of their body magnetism pervades and awakens a man's senses, they are too much for one's peace of mind. Swimming in this dream of beauty I walked forward through the throng of Nor-maids about Vanue to pay my homage to her beauty's might and to her as my chosen leader. Also I had to learn the whereabouts of Arl, as this homecoming was my first pleasure in months.

I was welcomed to a gathering so large it could hardly be in my honor, but felt so to me, with all the faces of

those too-lovely Nor-maids greeting me, and laying out their sweet souls in graceful thought augments for me to look upon. To know that their smiles were true ones—that was heart warming frankness.

I bent my knee before Vanue's seated might, and touched my forehead to her knee, which is the custom before one's chosen Elder.

Tonight Vanue was clad in some unusual fine mesh of conductive stuff through which ran the current from powerful vi-batteries¹ in her belt. The current was a synthetic vi. The magnetic flow caused the whole fabric to flame with tongues of vital, caressing energy. That cloud of floating hair which was one of Vanue's chief prides was bound tonight in a net, the cords of which were strung with huge rubies; so that Vanue was a living goddess of flame, and her matchless body was the pivot upon which all the eyes turned in that hall.

Her spirit was flaming tonight, too, and she led the furious revelry.

CHAPTER II

The Jotuns Play a Card

THE Jotuns are the pariahs of space. A numerous race, they live in abandoned borings on many planets on the rim of the Nor empire, as well as throughout the less desirable areas of all known space. Wherever the law does not reach, there one is apt to find the Jotuns. They deal in junk, slaves, and several stimulative drugs whose use is forbidden among civilized peoples. But no one worries much what happens to the Jotuns or their health. They are hardly considered as men. They have four limbs and a round head set on a man-like neck, it is true. But

¹ Vi is the Nor word for animal electric.—Ed.

they have immense and comical noses, wide mouths with thick lips, a dark and lumpy skin, huge bat-wing ears, short bowed legs, and a stringy, ungainly muscular development of no beauty whatever. They buy worn-out and condemned space-ships, repair them after their own apparently slovenly fashion, and with them voyage between their gloomy and filthy planet homes in the abandoned caverns of the greater space races.

At least that is the Nortan view of the Jotuns. Actually the Jotuns are a race whose luck threw them into a life where their backwardness left them no recourse but to cull the crumbs left by superior life for whatever might provide a means of existence. The Nortans had never been consciously antagonistic to them, but their attitude of supreme contempt had left the Jotuns **cultivated but dregs**. So the Jotuns had cultivated a furtive kind of piracy, and were seldom caught at it. One of their choice pursuits was the stealing of women when opportunity presented—whom they debased with their bastard science of growth learned from the Nortan and corrupted to other ends than had ever been the thought of the Nortan scientists. The pleasure palaces that flourished on the frontiers where law left off paid high prices for these little-advertised products of the Jotun industry. For around the vast frontiers of the space empires hang always the parasites and outlaws that every great nation breeds—and the pleasure palaces flourish to pander to the depraved tastes of these castoffs of the swarming life of the civilized worlds of dark space.

TODAY in the High Court of Nor city, there was much laughter. The Jotun tramp had berthed in the commerce port, to pick up its usual load of

unwanted junk. Someone had noticed several very human and non-Jotun-like women among the passengers or crew of the filthy ship. Questioned, the Jotuns were unwilling to account for the non-Jotuns' presence to the officials. They had been arrested and charged with slavery, the most serious crime on the Nor law books. The truth was, the higher-ups had wanted a chance to learn something about the activity of the Jotuns, and had seized the opportunity to give them a thorough going over. The case was sent to the highest court of all, that held by the Elder Rulers once a jarp.*

The Ruler, the oldest Elder in all Nor, questioned the Jotun tramp's skipper himself.

"Just *why* are these strange young people accompanying you Jotuns aboard your ship? Explain their presence to us!"

The fierce, ugly face of the Jotun glared steadily at the huge form of the Elder. His cunning little eyes danced here and there about the great, luxuriously constructed chamber, the rich drapes, the jeweled Nortans listening, the soft, rich atmosphere of Nortan well-being. That he hated it all was rather apparent. He was in no hurry to answer, but seemed to be thinking deeply, swiftly, on some problem not clear to anyone but himself. At last he shouted at the Elder, loudly and not at all abashed at the physical evidence of power before which his freedom and his life stood in jeopardy.

"They are young people of a far-off planet called Angleland. The people there are newly arrived colonists, and have no prejudices or hate against the Jotuns. They made our crew welcome there and we stayed some time. These fell in love with members of our crew, and left with us of their own free will."

* A jarp is about a fortnight of time.—Ed.

The phrase "fell in love" with *Jotuns*, brought a tremendous shout of laughter from the assembled Nortans. For to a Nortan mind the Jotun is the uttermost in repellent human life—the last word in undesirability in a mate. The answer in truth was a ridiculous one. For no normal appearing human would ever fall in love with a Jotun. It was as preposterous as falling in love with an ape.

The anger mounted in the Jotun leader's face as the laughter rose to a peak in the great court chamber. And as his anger mounted it seemed to answer the problem he had been revolving in his mind. A package fell from under his arm—a paper wrapped parcel—and broke open. A number of tiny glittering marbles rolled everywhere about the floor. No one noticed the mishap, and the Jotun skipper did not appear to notice the incident either.

THE Ruler of all Nor ceased his prolonged chuckle to turn to the young people in question, who were blond Angles, recent settlers from Earth's migrations. His great voice seemed to arouse no awe in the young Angles as he asked,

"Is this true—this preposterous statement of the defense?"

The comely young Angles, all of about the same size, running from six to seven feet, and none of them over thirty years of age, nodded their heads in assent.

"What the chief says is true, O mighty Lord," was their astounding answer.

A deep silence fell upon the courtroom, for the thralldom of fear or something worse in which the young Angles were enmeshed, was so evident that all present realized that here was something far worse than slavery.

As the great voice of the ancient Elder went on, saying— "Why do you call this man a chief? Is he, then, more than just the captain of a particularly slovenly tramp space-vessel?"—the chief of the motley, dangerous looking crew noticed the gew gaws rolling over the floor under his feet, and bent frantically trying to gather up the spilled gauds, but they rolled everywhere across the green glitter of the marble paving.

His efforts aroused another laugh at his expense, for all Jotuns cut a ridiculous figure in a Nortan eye. He crouched there on the polished floor, a small figure among the great of this court, though his height was a good forty feet standing.*

The great bodies of the Elders who staffed the court dwarfed him, but something in his eyes as they darted everywhere, searching the faces of these Lords of Infinite Powers, told one that he had no fear of them, and little respect. Those darting, evil eyes and scaly-fingered hands made ineffectual and comic efforts to pick up the tiny, rolling, glistening things. Near him the aristocratic noses of the Nor audience wrinkled at the smell of unwashed flesh his movements drove from his filthy, food-stained clothing.

One Jotun was busy putting several paper wrapped bundles into the mail chute. A passing Nor guard called, "Stupid—that's an airshaft, not a mail chute."

* Though the Jotuns were not immortal—strictly speaking—their use of the abandoned mechanisms and technical growth methods of the immortal races, which they had picked up from use of the mechanisms and from observation of the Nortan life, had given them similar growth; but at about the age of this Chief, which was several centuries—they began to decline and eventually die; for the abandoned mech are abandoned for that reason—the disintegrant poisons have begun to accumulate within the metal of the generators, and are therefore not safe for immortals.—Ed.

The Jotun fumbled with the packages, two of them broke open. He picked up the remains, shambled on to the mail chute. As soon as the guard walked on he moved down the passage to the next air shaft, went through the same fumbling process. No one noticed or cared what a dim-witted Jotun might do at an air shaft.

Suddenly the officer of the guards standing about the court was made suspicious by the fellow's peculiar behavior, and barked an order.

"Collect those jewels and bring them to me. We may have something else illegal there. He is entirely too worried about those stones—if stones they are. I say put these people at once into thought mech augment and find out just what this is all about."

THE ruler of Nor, now officiating as the Judge, raised a hand to summon the augment⁴ rays from numerous guard ray chambers, of which there were dozens trained on the court even now from the war-ray chambers about the mighty cavern that was the home of the High Court of all Nor.

A startled expression stole over the majestic face of the ancient and wise Elder. Something unique in his tremendously long life experience had happened. The Nortan guard ray was not on duty. The court was unprotected by the ever-present guard rays that answered any summons of a citizen instantly he raised a hand. He knew instinctively that some great danger was

threatening Nor, for the watch and care of the system of security that had made their life inviolable was a fanatic religion with the Nortans.

The guard rays had not answered his summons instantly! A great and unexplainable weakness ran through his mighty frame as his mind struggled to think, and failed. He turned agonizedly to the officer of the guard, meaning to order an immediate search of the war-ray chambers for the source of the negligence. But only gasps came from his mouth in his efforts to explain to the Nor-Lords, the mightiest judicial talent in Nor, ranged in order of seniority.

Even as the Nortan faces turned incredulous eyes to the fallen might of their ruler, whom they revered as a God; even as their minds leaped to solve the question, "What could happen to the very center and peak of our strength, the apex of Nor might—to the awful array of weapons and Godlike men who guarded this, the heart of Nortan government?"—even as the people rose to flee from this impossible . . . this *mad* situation confronting them—their faces, too, went blank, and the great courtroom was peopled only by the fiercely grinning Jotun mariners of space. The empty-faced, mindless hulks of the God-Elders of Nor were all that remained in the court to rule the Nortan people. They sat as they had before; not dead, but victims of some terrible stroke of fate that had taken their minds and left only the despised Jotun pariahs thinking in a conscious way.

The Nor Elders were Gods—yet fallen victims of the despised Jotuns. It couldn't have happened to them—but it had.

Never, in all the history of the Elder worlds had such a thing happened. It had never even been imagined.

⁴ The penetrative rays used by the Nortans penetrate many miles of solid rock, giving a perfect visual image of anything within range, even through rock. By attachments to the apparatus, the penetra will also augment anyone's thought within the vision range, the conductive penetray acting as the serial wire leading to the brain of the subject—the augment apparatus being similar to a radio, but tuned to the short-waves of thought.—Ed.

CHAPTER III

Vanue Discovers a Strange Thing

WHEN they revel in Nor, they revel! For they are healthy beyond anything mortals can conceive; they do not tire, and once started, the dancing and love-making go on for days. Among the people are always many returned from trips to far places never before heard of by the stay-at-homes; newly discovered planets full of strange life—or the far planets of the known Nor empire; and these voyagers are always surrounded by groups of ecstatic questioners.

Then, too, the art of entertainment is developed to a power beyond the ordinary meaning of the word. The highly developed minds, equipped with mind reading devices all their lives and expert in the use of mental image augmentors and projectors, knew in all the intricate variations and developments to which there is no end, all those images which in the mind arouse pleasure. The developing of such lines of thought is with them a science. So it is that dancing has a mental side with them far greater than mere physical movement. If you will analyze your own pleasure in a dance or other form of entertainment you will realize that much of it is entirely mental and could be produced by another mind. Using mental augmentation of image, a gathering in Nor is a different thing than a gathering among mortals. It is a gathering of powerful minds in full contact and awareness each of the other. The magic of mind, the pleasure of such meetings, is not understood except by those who have used mental image augmentors.

So it is that here on Nor other people's thoughts of one are more important than one's own appearance. One wears a mental impression of one's self

that is constantly modified by contact with others' thought about one, and any rents in that garment are instantly perceived by one's mind, to the hurt of one's ego. The effort to repair the damage done by one's own negligence toward others becomes automatic.

Thus, revelry among the Nortans includes a thought image projection contributed to by all. Each can direct a small personal ray onto the great thought clouds and contribute his part to the creation and exchange of erotic and other forms of images. Revelry under these conditions seems a dream in which everything that one wants or imagines is instantly fulfilled, because others notice one's thoughts and wishes, and answer them in a satisfying way—an endlessly entertaining way.

Life without mental intercourse is a sterile emptiness beside life with such intercourse. Any relationship is infinitely more satisfying under such conditions, as few mistakes are made, for each knows the other's wishes before they are really grown into full thought.

TONIGHT, in this concourse of keenly sensed minds, after months away from these, my friends, *I noticed alien thought!* No one but myself seemed aware of this alien presence, yet I sensed it strongly as I entered for the first time. The loved place my heart yearned for had changed. Something was terribly sickly different. I surmised it was a thing that had stolen upon the place so gradually that they were used to it before it was really strong enough to notice consciously. Something was horribly different—and the indifference to the change a sick feature of the change.

Of late years the thought image projectors had been reduced in size, so that tiny ones could be worn as part of the garment, and when a couple danced,

their thought images merged and played about them in all their revealing beauty. For mental nudity can be infinitely more glorious than mere beauty of the solid fleshly form. Such dancing, with the thought pictures visible and cloudily iridescent about their forms—being an innate and definite, an intricate and designed *part* of the body's rhythmic movement to the sound—was especially delightful for the onlookers.

I stood rapt in ecstatic *awe* of Vanue and her intended mate. He was a ruler from the heavy planets. He had come to Nor for no other reason than to seek out the beauty of the famous Vanue and find out if it was all report claimed. He had remained to pay his court. Instinctively I examined the man's thought intently, for I expected him to be the source of the alien presence I had sensed, but it was not true. Though he was from afar, there was about him none of the cloudy, destructive intent I had noticed as alien; none of the savage, parasitically lazy presence at all. He had Nor blood in his veins—or blood from some strain like the Nor—for his thought was not different in essentials than others, though much surer and finer than most.

I abandoned the idea. He was a fine fellow; a fit mate for even the mighty Vanue as far as I could see. His head was dark and curly and pressed close beside Vanue's cloud of gold, his mighty arm curled about her shoulders; and the flash of his teeth in laughter gave no savage hint of the thing I was dreading to find. He was a *man*. There was no thing I could find at fault in him.

As the dance broke up into groups watching Vanue and her partner, she noticed that everyone else was watching them and they ceased dancing in a burst of laughter like many falling crystal balls, laughing thought forms about them.

Still laughing, they drew toward one of the talking groups and I joined them, hoping to ask her about the alien presence I had sensed. She heard my seeking thought and answered, "I had not noticed, but now you mention it, I would say we have with us a spy ray, and have had for some time."

There was no more revelry for most of Vanue's following that night. She called her maidens to her, and ears burned. "Leave it to little Mion to smell out a stranger in our midst. What are you supposed to be doing—decorating the place with your charms only? No more dancing for any of you; get to work, every one, and find this thing—ray or person—whatever it may be."

SEARCHING the endless corridors and chambers of the Vanue borings and the neighboring caverns with great talaus beams, the swift-fingered helpers of my lady soon located the trouble. Strangely enough, the alien thought was found to source in several of their own number—which absolved them of blame, but did not help the explanation any.

The few found with that condition had not felt right for some time, a weakness having come upon them, and their thought had gradually changed from forms of the usual kind of their own making to alien and different thought forms not of their own creation. The girls' minds were probed for hours, but the strange trouble revealed no cause.

For some reason they were no longer themselves, but acted like different people—people with whom none of us were acquainted. They seemed like visitors from some far place and none too welcome visitors either. The two were taken to the great laboratories of the Vans in the depth of the great cavern palace of the family. Placed under the strongest thought augmentation their

science could devise, the phenomenon remained a puzzle.

Vanue was a high officer in the military organization of Nor, and her maidens were of various ranks under command, as well as many men like myself, who had chosen Vanue as our leader because of our admiration for her—in spite of prevailing Nor prejudice against serving under a woman. Because of this prejudice, which was ancient among the Nor, her organization was predominantly female. In a people who habitually conduct themselves by the observed thought of those about them, there is never any confusion as to who is to do what, and very little confusion over precedence or procedure, for some minds about always know what is best or accepted procedure, and one takes his cue from these minds. In this case Arl and I knew that Vanue expected us to stay and observe the search for the strange thought which had seemed like a spy ray, but which could not be understood now that we had found the source. This thought of Vanue's gave us the right to be in on the thing until its conclusion.

THERE were a dozen or more of us, now old friends of Vanue's following, about the great screens where the augmentive rays were slowly being concentrated upon each section of the suspect minds to find the source of the trouble. As the mech took thought record as well as micro-film photos of the thought activity, we soon had photographs, rolls of moving picture film, to enlarge and study.

It was a very strange mental landscape we looked upon—not at all like the less powerfully enlarged thought images normally handled by such methods. For Vanue had installed an ultra-powerful thought image enlarger to keep her laboratories ahead of the rest.

This machine reached down into the tiny world below the cell's field images and found the basic, the primary parts of the image, and brought them up to visibility. What one saw was not thought—but a square root of thought—tiny sections of what would have been full sized thought images had one seen the whole of it. Here the frail fringe of visibility in thought had been reached, and what one saw was to thought what a snow flake is to a snow drift.

As we slowed the rapidly rolling film to a snail's pace to observe more thoroughly the ultra-rapid movements which take place in the world of the ultra-small—we saw the frail fringe of fine thought-fibers—a chameleon-like effusion of the mind cells—looking like the dangling tentacles of air plants hung about the mighty trunks of the stronger cell fiber tentacles. Amid this strange and unworldly green gloom, like a great jungle of ever changing leaves, plants, grasses and trees, there were alien life forms—for suddenly and with a terrible fear clutching at our surprised thoughts we saw pale white faces peering forth from the mossy limbed and many trunked green gloom of the fantastic, fecund forest that is the small, micro world within a man.

"What are they?" I asked Vanue excitedly, for this kind of man life in the tiny micro world we were looking in upon was entirely a new thing to me.

"A thing I have often feared, since I knew it could exist, but which I never heard of before except in my imagination. It is a micro race, invading our bodies. We must all be quarantined until the danger has been fully understood."

THE great voice of Firko, the ruler of the planet called Falnorn, who was present as Vanue's intended, and had been her partner in the dance, here

broke in with concern:

"Vanne, my beloved, you would have heard of these and been prepared to meet this danger except for an obsolete law upon the ancient law books of my people. Upon Heavy Enn, the great Elder Planet around which my home Falnorn swings as a satellite—an experiment has been going on with a micro-man life form since a thousand years ago. But it has been kept in uttermost secrecy because the blind, untechnical keepers of the law would have suppressed the experiment. The law in question is a good one, but it reads: 'And no one may in any wise harm, injure, distort or in any way mutilate the unborn child with drugs, manipulations . . . ' Anyway, a law designed to protect the four-limbed state of the race against such things as the vari-form idea has operated to block all experiments with decreased birth sizes—which is the basic idea behind the work of which I speak. So of necessity it has remained a secret among my family and a few Elder scientists—but nevertheless an experiment in long term manipulation of the size of the young of man. Volunteer subjects among us who knew of the experiment, have given our seed to the scientists—who, subjecting the seed to certain drugs and vibrants in the incubation period—have brought forth dwarfs. The dwarfs, in turn, have been taught and bred to use certain drugs continually and their offspring in turn were smaller by far. After many centuries of persistent application of this method of reduction of birth size, we have—on Enn—a place we call 'Small Focii' where these little men have actually entered the microcosm.

"It is also true that some of the tiny race have grown dissatisfied and fled, at different periods in the past fifty years. Small Focii is a monster world, but to the eye it is only a block of marble,

bathed perpetually in strong beneficial green rays and drenched forever with a ruby nutrient liquid spray. Within it one of the great experiments of all time reaches its secret fruition. That fruition will mean endless new planes of expansion for all the God races.

"If we tell your lawmakers here of our discovery we will all be quarantined and kept here—while if I take my ship and go to the technical men of the secret circle who guard Small Focii on Heavy Enn, we will have the best help against this plague—for I have no doubt it will reach to the proportions of a plague in time. I think that these tiny men we see here parasitizing the minds of these maidens are descendants of those micro-men of Small Focii, who have fled the watchful eyes of the scientists to indulge their own ideas of how to live without work, as parasites of the rich and healthy bodies of greater man. It may also be true that some of those who escaped from Small Focii have fallen into the hands of evil men, who have brought the infection to Nor city—for purposes we may learn to our sorrow before we are through. This is not a minor discovery. An intelligent parasite of the tiny size we have observed may be a fearful opponent."

THE mighty bristled hand, on which the hair follicles bristled like the hairs on the skin of a young elephant, reached out and touched a control on the nearby film projector. The little faces we had been watching moved into a blur of speedy activity—and then could not be seen at all.

"Now they are moving at the normal speed and we cannot even see them. For time is to them much, much longer than to us, and the elapsed time since those micro-men fled from Heavy Enn has been to us but a few years, but to them eons of time. Watch the extreme ra-

pidity. That is why it was so hard to discover the source of the alien thought. This infection can spread through all Nor by the time I have traversed the void and brought from my home a counter force to wage a war upon this invisible, unreachable menace."

I opened my mouth, feeling like the fool rushing in upon the angel's fears:

"It sounds tremendously serious. Is it fatal—as fatal an event as my mind tells me it is?"

The noble, wise face of Vanue's beloved young ruler from the Elder planet of Enn gazed sadly down upon me.

"Serious is hardly word enough for the thing, my young friend. This could mean the death of man as we know him. Everything depends upon the attitude of the multitude of tiny races now living within Small Focii. Should they cast their lot with these parasites against their secret creators, it would very probably mean the end of Nortan life, at the least."

Tears rolled down Vanue's face as she talked, almost to herself: "That is why we did not discover them, eh? Their small size gives them a relative speed too great for our size life to perceive. They are infinitely beyond and ahead of our own rate of motion. They are invisible to us, but our apparatus has caught and frozen the motion so that at last they become visible to us. We must make endless amounts of such films until we know all there is to learn about this race—for this is an invasion of Nor life by a nearly invincible enemy—an enemy we may never defeat. I am not entirely sure there is no evil purpose, no agency of our own size behind this invasion."

The great voice of Firko of Falnorn was heavy with an urgency of anxiety for Vanue.

"Vanue, there is no time for such work. The only hope for your own

mind, for your own life—is to flee at once with me to Heavy Enn, there to get immediate help from the micro races of secret Small Focii. They can drive out these parasites, should they choose to do so. But we have no time to attack this thing with blind, experimental moves. If you stay here, your mind will be gone within days, for you have already been exposed to the infection—within hours you may be babbling like a child. Then, when you have been fully protected by an infusion of a sane and trained race of micro-men, we can return to Nor and proceed about the work of freeing the people of Nor from the last trace of the infection."

"Firko—" Vanue said, her voice showing her surprise that he should think her capable of abandoning her people, "Firko, my place is here. Take your ship, the *Black Prince*, and speed your course to Heavy Enn as only you can send a ship—as I have seen you drive in violation of all the rules ever made for space flight. Take with you Mutan Mion and Lady Arl. Take, too, those of my maidens who are infected, that the scientists of Enn can see what the invaders look like. Return as soon as you can, with all the help the vast science of Heavy Enn is capable of raising. I will stay here and do what I can. You are not to worry about me while you are gone, for I will be safer than you think. Now, the Gods speed you, my beloved, and may my love waiting here for you be the guarantee that you will return. And if you do return and successfully defeat this sudden horror that has beset the life of Nor, the answer you have been awaiting from me will be delayed no longer. I must remain; there are many reasons. Go, O my beloved."

Within minutes, the *Black Prince* was swinging its long nose aloft in the up-tilting launching cradle. Inside I was

strapping Ari into the acceleration seat. The "ready" alarm was ringing madly, warning all that to not prepare for instant acceleration would be deadly.

CHAPTER IV

The Death of a Nation of God-Like Men

BACK in the High Court, things had changed from the scene of a few days ago. Lolling in the great throne of chalcedony which was the ruler's throne of Justice, stretched the twisted, evil limbs of the Chief of the Jotuns. About him lounged the other members of his crew in grinning triumph. Beside them crouched the beautiful forms of Nor maids. Their eyes were blank pools of pain, their lovely floating hair now tangles of madness; their clothes that hung so irresistibly on the thrilling rounds of the limbs of the Norwomen trailed now in tatters, or not at all. On that too-white, too-luscious skin that is the mark of Nor blood, purple bruises bloomed where kicks or blows had shown the gratitude of the Jotuns for services rendered. But all the Nor maids humbled themselves in the same attitude of mindless obeisance to a master. Something had happened to them that left them obedient slaves. Over the great green marble floor raced the children of the Jotuns in mad play, while among them stumbled the great Nor men bearing food on trays, flagons of stimulative potions or priceless samples of the mechanical art of stim manufacture; or, quite often, leading a loved daughter or female relative for appraisal by one of the Jotuns. And on all the faces sat the same mindless, slavish expression as of a beaten dog—through all the many chambers of the great cavern.

"... and if we play our cards correctly"—the Chief of the Jotuns was ex-

pounding to his swarthy, intent followers— "the riches of all this soft nation of Nor will fall in our laps. When someone comes here, he will not be allowed to leave; when a ray from the city inquires—straightaway that ray dies at his mech. And if anyone smells a rat—him they will send here first—and we will give him a hatful of our little friends to carry back to his friends with him. Ah, it was a lucky day I stumbled upon the micro race that fled from the great laboratories of some far world. And a luckier day when I noted on the pages of an ancient book with which I was starting a fire the details of the use of a similar race and the methods used to keep them under control. 'Life of the Microcosm', the book was called, and told how they had controlled and used the tiny life as a weapon. Long ago such life was used as a weapon by the race who rules space now; but the thing has been forgotten. The book told how the tiny life was trained to eat away the connecting tissues of the brain cells and so render an enemy witless. Why, those untold millions of little people hear my thought and obey it before I have even realized what it is myself. My thought has been their law, because I have shown them for so many years that in no other way can they win the rewards they crave and of which only I know the nature. Ah, many years I trained them to attack only the enemy. Now, I have my reward."

THE stupid, evil faces followed the words of the savage and cunning leader, sagely nodding agreement. "And to think that merely dropping a few quarts of the little people into the air shaft as we entered the court, would finish off every watch-ray guarding the court! Who would think they would be so well trained, so smart, as to at-

tack the watchers of the ray first—eh? Smarter than many men, those little ones.”

“They *are* men, those little ones—and they think even faster than men, by far,” mused the leader.

“How did you know, O Fenrir,” asked one of the lounging lesser Jotuns, “just where that ventilator shaft led when you dropped the little ones into it?”

“Why, Rohat, a renegade from Nor law, took refuge with me years ago. He had worked on the boring of these tunnels. He had a plan of revenge on this court which outlawed him, and showed me the one place where gas dropped into the air tubes would take death to all the ray within. But I had a better thing than gas to drop into the tubes!” He laughed at the thought of it. “Are my little friends not a weapon, eh? The ancient books say there is no weapon to equal them for invisibility and for swift potency of effect. A bomb of micro life spreads, ever wider and wider, and it is not observed until it is too late. In the ancient days they used a micro-ant, but when I got these little men into my hands—then I knew I had the world at my feet. Within a week there will not be a whole mind left on all Nor. Every man, woman and child of the whole empire will be under our thumb then. Ah, the Jotuns will not joke then. They will rule space as did the Nor, till now. Let us drink to the future of the noble Jotuns. No longer the despised of space, but the warlords of all Nor-space.”

The fierce Jotun Chief pounded the great horseshoe of the tribunal with the gavel. “Bring up the next case—” he bawled in rude mockery of the Nortan judges.

BEFORE him shuffled a mighty Elder of Nor, mindless now as were all

the Nortans for miles around the court buildings. The Jotun pushed him forward with many a buffet and kick.

“What is the charge?” bawled the mock judge. “For years this great windbag has thought himself superior to the Jotun. He has despised our race, and allowed us no rights but the rights accorded any dog. He has made no attempt to help our wretched life or release us from the evil habits which consume our health. He has forbidden any Nortan to mingle with or to teach the Jotun, for fear we could use the science we might learn to make trouble for him. Consequently we are ignorant of kindness, humanity, morality, or the dictates of our conscience. Consequently we are also ignorant of the necessity of keeping this great overstuffed fool alive longer. We have not learned justice or law or science of any kind from the Nortans, nor have we learned respect for the mighty work of art he thinks himself to be. I charge this great booby with criminal neglect of his self-interest in despising the Jotun.”

The lounging outcasts of space shouted in laughter. “Criminal neglect of self-interest—ho-ho—that’s rich, that’s rare! Sentence him, judge; give him his dues, judge—”

“I sentence this overbearing rascal to a horrible deed, so that even his dim mind will perceive that horror is the result of his contempt for the Jotuns. He will be forced to eat the flesh of his own wife!”

* Among the Jotuns, the customary practice of the use of the growth devices they obtain from the ruined Elder cities is to overdevelop the women from childhood on. This overdevelopment of certain parts of the body results in an unbalance of the woman’s system—and the consequence is a stupid creature of unusual appetites. To the Jotun’s mind the women are so inferior that they eat the women in famine—then obtain others when relief comes. Their women are bought and sold like cattle—as among the blacks of Africa.—Ed.

A young, nearly good looking Jotun stepped forth at this stage of the "trial."

"O my wise leader—" he began in the usual formality of the Jotun; "may I be granted permission to plead the case of this man—as well as the case of all these prisoners of ours?"

"Speak on," growled the leader, not paying much attention, for he was fondling the waist of a young, dazed Nor woman.

"FELLOW outcasts and comrade pirates," began the youngster; "I am acquainted with the fact that the poor always blame the mighty for their ills. I am also aware that the mighty are seldom aware of the ills of the poor. For centuries past we have watched these Nor men grow and prosper, while we have lived on the crumbs from their rich life. It is true that they have never offered us a share in their prosperity—have always ignored us as unfit for the rights of citizenry.

"But I plead that they have never been cruel or consciously antagonistic to us. They have never realized the enormity of their offenses against us. But their contempt has resulted in a denial of our right to live—for our primitive state has made us unable to compete with their advanced methods of production of the things of life. This contempt has resulted directly in our poverty, and consequently in our devious and piratical methods of obtaining the things in life which we must have.

"I think it was this same contempt of the contents of our minds which made possible the trick by which we gained control of this, the nerve center of Nor city. In return for their contempt, we have succeeded in robbing these Nortans of their minds. I suggest that we Jotuns take a lesson from

the unconscious cruelty of the Nortans, and have more mercy, more consideration for these our defeated overlords, than they ever had for us. By acting mercifully in this, our opportunity, other men of space who might be our enemies will take counsel and say, 'Why hate and despise these Jotuns? They are wiser and more merciful than were ever the mighty Nortan face. Let us aid them, and they may aid us in time of need!'"

THE leader scowled down upon the young and comparatively well favored warrior. "Such words are always to be found in the mouths of the young, the foolish and the woman-minded. They were also to be found in the mouths of the Nortan teachers. I, your Chief, have thought and studied long upon such words of supposed wisdom. I say the law of the jungles of the life worlds (sun-planet life) is the only law—and all other laws are fools' creations and do not fit the facts of life. The strong must eat the weak, and the ant-horde will swiftly eat the strong if he is not able to run away.

"I say such things point the way of wisdom. It is our duty to destroy this race called the Nortans, root and branch, so that we may live. They have never left us room or opportunity in all space we have been able to reach—they have got there first and their industry has absorbed all opportunity down to the bare bones. So we lived on bones. If we coddle them now, they will hate us just the same because we made fools of them; as we have, literally. Sooner or later they will rise against us, for our ways are not their ways, nor even can be.

"I say this over-stuffed and over-proud mollicoddle should be made to eat his own wife, as his own despise for us has made many of us eat our own

wives, as is our custom during famine. It was their monopolies of all things in space made me eat my own wife long ago. What do you despised worms of the cold voids say?"

The Chief cast his eyes upon these followers of his; fierce, wild, cunning eyes, that had long led them and kept them from the many traps that would have destroyed their freebooting life. Their minds had long followed his decisions. Almost to a man they roared approbation of his bloody counsel.

The young Jotun stepped down sadly from the low dais he had ascended to make his entreaty for the life of the Nortans. Some of them had been kind to him in the far past; he could not hate the beautiful Nor men or Nor women.

But love and wisdom are not things that grow well in the de-light from worn-out cavern city stimulative beneficial ray mechanisms, or decaying ben-ray mech, and these men of the Jotuns had the evil of dis-electric in the cores of their minds. He was learning the hardest lesson that wisdom has to teach—the basic upon which all true wisdom rests. That is: thought which seems correct is not correct if it is tainted with dis-electric, but thought so tainted convinces men who are also tainted inwardly with dis-electric charges, even though to a clean man the way of wisdom is quite clear. He was learning again the thing that wisdom must ever learn before it is wisdom—that men are not governed by thought or logic, but only seem to be so governed to the casual eye.⁹

SO the young and noble-minded Jotun stepped down sadly and watched with sick eyes while the great mindless Godman before them was given a knife and made to carve great chunks of flesh from the living, screaming, fully conscious body of his own wife and

eat the boody meat before them all. The Jotun at the control rays making the great one do this deed laughed with pleasure as the deed was done.

But the young Jotun knew that such monstrous sport would bring all organized life in space against them, for he knew something of the vast power of the Elder life of Nor and the nature of their allies, which the Chief and his ignorant men did not know. He knew that their tenure on Nor would be short. He saw the drunkenness and neglect of obvious measures for their safety; the failure to contact all other Jotun groups and bring them at once to invest the city with a mighty force of fighting men—on the excuse that to do so would cost them the best of the city's loot. He knew they were doomed; that the leader was overconfident of his cunning that had served them so well in the past.

The Jotun leader, Fenrir, thought that he could hold the center of Nor

⁹ Men are governed by the interior induction of two penetrative forces about them, which shapes the intent of their thought. The disintegrant force gives destructive intent thought, while the integrative force electric gives creative, good intent thought. Ever the two intents, the two dissimilar patterns of thought must war, so long as men obey them, and both kinds of thought seem perfectly correct to those who think them. The well-intended Jotun was young and uninfected with dis-force patterning of his intent, for by chance the ray mech of his childhood home had been fairly new and unused when the greater races had abandoned the cavern to his own despised Jotun race. Such hen-rays grow a mind whose thought is love and creative effort, for little disintegrance penetrates the integrant fields of the beneficial rays to cause distortion of the thought into evil intent. The Jotun dimly perceived this fundamental difference between his own thought and the thought of such men as his leader. The young Jotun knew there was an unreconcilable conflict of the patterns of thought about him. One day he would perceive the immense drive behind these thought patterns from the powerful induction from all space source forces upon the minds of men—which gives rise to the two forms of thought which cause men's endless strife and seeming necessity for the killing of other men.—Ed.

with a pretense over the telerays that they were the Elder Nor themselves, and save the inquiring rays of the Nor-patrol with the message that all Nor city was stricken with a terrible plague, so that none might enter safely, which was true enough. The Chief expected that simple orders over the long range rays to remain away from Nor for fear of the plague would keep them in safety till the riches of the city would fall in their hands.

It was a bold scheme, but it contained too many holes for error, too many places where the overconfidence of the Chief expected his tricks to carry them through. He did not know that the Nor-patrol were used to impersonating people by talking through a thought record of the person impersonated, and would detect their trick immediately. There were many such items he was in ignorance about, but then, he had succeeded so far—why worry? Success is a heady drug, and it takes a great deal of it to give immunity to its effects. The Jotun leader had always led a hunted and unsuccessful life. This was his first great coup. True, they had taken many ships, but never a great city before. The young Jotun knew it would be the last one, and planned for mercy for them accordingly, but to no avail.

CHAPTER V

Vanue's Supreme Sacrifice

THE resourceful Vanue did not waste time waiting for problematical help from the vast heavy worlds, of which Enn was one. The huge laboratory in the palace that was her home became a scene of fierce activity—a mighty effort to beat the ultra-rapid life of the micro race with intelligent and precise effort. Her maidens searched the minds

of all within range of her rays in the great city. When an infected one was found, he was brought to the laboratory, and his mind kept continuously recording the mental images—which were then slowed down and carefully observed for some clue as to how the tiny race of voracious, parasitic men might be counter attacked. Soon she had hundreds of patients, and had to stop bringing them in, as the access of fresh numbers of micro-men cut her own time of sanity lower still. By the observed rate of the infection in her blood she had but a few days at the most. Then she would become a shambling thing of no mind, as had so many of her race. Vanue did not know that at any time the Jotun Chief might learn of her and send a fresh horde of little men to stop her mind forever. So she worked on, nor thought of flight.

THE micro-men were not at all self supporting, but existed entirely by feeding on the nutrient fluids brought to the cells by the blood capillaries. They traveled from victim to victim by several methods. One way was in the colored crystal balls, which were in truth the micro-man's cities, and varied in size from tiny invisible crystals to great city globes the size of marbles and quite visible. Sometimes these micro race cities appeared in huge swellings on the arm of a patient, the swelling broke, the glittering marble emerged and rolled by some means she could not learn toward a better, fresher victim. One thing she noticed particularly was that there were two distinct types of micro-men. One kind of tiny man showed evidences of recent and strict training, a military precision of procedure and a smart, almost intelligent order about his life. The second type was wholly primitive and appeared never to have heard of any organiza-

tion or discipline of any kind. Just what this difference signified she could not decide.

As time crept on, the hours of her feverish activity mounted toward the total she had set as the last limit of her consciousness. As the loss of her mind approached, which time she had gauged by observing the progress of the disease in others, taking her own blood count and comparing it with theirs—she realized that Firko was right, that it would have been wiser to flee and return with full preparation to fight the menace, for no ordinary methods prevailed. But Vanue was stubborn and a woman, and would not admit that truth to herself. Keenly calculating the time left her, she set about the plan she had intended to follow when she sent her beloved away.

"I shall infect these little lives with the virus of usefulness," said Vanue to herself, smiling sadly.

So she set thousands of separate cultures of the little people under a thousand separate kinds of pleasure rays, for she had noted that the intense pleasure they experienced had slowed their voracious spread through the flesh of the victim. She accordingly immersed her own body in the intense pleasure rays, knowing that she had prolonged her time allotment.

Then she varied the conditions of life for the invisible race, with a vengeance. With all her vast knowledge of beneficial rays, vibrants, nutrients and nutrient energy flows, she put her thousand sample colonies of the little people under a thousand separate sets of conditions. Some were provided with every possible nutrient to increase their size and vigor, others were placed under constantly varying detrimental vibrations and constantly varying forms of nutrient, so that nothing existed for them that they could depend on but

their own efforts to bring some kind of order out of the induced chaos Vanue made of their life's fixed pattern.

OTHERS she dosed with intent vibrants — strong thought record augments of intent and simple logic forms. When she got them well into it she had a dozen different types of development of the little men whose capabilities under the magnifying lenses and augmenting mech, as recorded on film, showed ways of living that even the magnificent imaginations of the Nor scientists had not glimpsed. Now Vanue crossed all the best products of her intensive development of the race and produced a race of manifold potentialities—of sparkling, fecund mental powers. To top it, they had attained a scientific development beyond anything she had thought possible in the time she had allowed for the job.

Now she was ready to communicate with the race she had created. Time was short, and in her mind she visioned Firko spiralling down to the surface of his own small world where it circled the mighty weight of the vast planet Heavy Enn. With thought record of scientists at work building and repairing mental augmentation equipment, she powered the micro waves she had used to induce beneficial intent in the little men, with the thought record of apparatus creation, until the little men were forced by the overpowering thought flows to build likewise—were robots to the great strength of the thought sent into their micro world. Thus they built thought augmentors with the intense speed with which they moved, and within minutes after she started the effort to communicate with them, they were talking to her through a slowed down record of their own thought. The fecundity and power of the little race told her something about

hybrid races, for the race was a hybrid of several nearly distinct strains she had bred and isolated. It told her that Nor men were wrong when they frowned on crossing Nor blood with other races. The weakness of Nor was vastly plainer to her now. They needed new blood, it was true.

Now Vanue gave the little men she had created from a savage parasite, weapons, and began to train them in their use. These men of hers had forgotten their savagery and had imbibed the loyalty and love she had taught them, with an encouraging enthusiasm. Her vast need for their effort she carefully explained to them, and then her fading mind lost track of their furious, all-embracing effort in a fog of sick emptiness. . . .

THEN the blow fell. It fell like an ax upon her efforts for the life of Nor. An order from the ruler of all Nor—a huge, official looking parchment with the official seal was brought to her by a squad of Nortan guards from the great barracks near the central court. The order forbade all work on the experiment with the micro race, saying that any such experiments were apt to invigorate and make more dangerous the terrible plague, and that the official scientists of the Nortan government had been empowered to keep all such work under strict observation. Full counter measures were being taken, and all other work was to cease until it had been thoroughly checked by the Nortan government scientists in control of disease. The phrasing of the order would have told the real Vanue exactly what was up, but the growing fog in her mind made the official command and the subsequent forcible locking of her laboratories by the armed guards, who took up sentry duty at the entrances, a death blow to her efforts.

The mists in Vanue's mighty brain lifted momentarily in her sudden anger at the official stupidity arising against her in this terrible emergency, and her rebellion made her swift hands conceal several vials of the micro-men cultures in her bosom as she left the laboratory for the last time.

In her sleeping chamber, Vanue wearily activated the great vision ray at her bedside and swept its all-seeing eye over the great dying city that was her home. Softly, steadily, she wept at what her eyes successively revealed to her. The activity, the gay, ambitious, vaulting life of Nor was gone,—dead. Instead of the busy libraries, the swarms of students, the speeding ships of commerce, the busy ways jammed with rollats; instead of all the beautiful and intense life of Nor there existed a slow moving people with dull, empty faces like masks. Not even despair lived in their faces, for they had not the sense left to realize their plight.

Knowing that within short minutes, perhaps, she herself would be one with the stupid horde that had been the race of Nor, with fumbling motions she took a hypodermic from the drawer, inserted it in the vial of micro-men culture, and shot the teeming life into her arm. As she slipped to the floor and oblivion she was praying silently—"May love and loyalty serve Nor this day, even in the veins of these little men whose father race destroys us. . . ."

Would these cultured little men she had spent her last strength upon defeat, if they could, the intelligence she realized must be directing the rape of the Nor race? Dimly she knew that somewhere in the city the author of this vast doom on her loved people was gloating with triumph. Or had her activity been so closely observed that there was truly no hope for anyone on Nor; no hope but that speeding ship

the *Black Prince*, now far, far out in space. . . ?

As she lost consciousness, she murmured—"Is this, then, the death of all the noble effort of the Nor race? The Gods, then, are cruel, and not the men I think them."

CHAPTER VI

Mutan Sees the World of the Elder Gods

AFTER long days in ultra-rapid traverse of the void, Firko braked the ship around the heaviest planet I had observed yet, and spiraled down to the surface of a glittering plastic enclosed satellite of the great world called Heavy Enn. This glittering little world was his ancient ancestral home, Falnorn.

It had been a passage dominated by the powerful mind of Firko, ruler of the planetoid below us. He knew every possible orbit of every possible variation of our course, and the perilous precision with which his great, black mossed hands throttled the jets to full "On" whenever the grav needles wavered to a zone of weightlessness about us, froze us to our seats with both fear and suddenly acquired acceleration velocity.

His handling of the huge *Black Prince* was a thing more admirable in a pilot than I had ever seen. Under ordinary circumstances, the chances he took would have resulted rightly in a loss of the right to pilot a ship for life, if reported officially. But in this horrible emergency, with the life of a nation depending on the speed with which we made the trip, I could but grip my seat arms and fearfully admire his grim, ironjawed control, which proved far superior to any robot pilot ever constructed, for we beat the usual time for the trip by half. If he had misjudged the application of full power to the jets

by the slightest hairsbreadth, or failed to shut off the acceleration power the instant the renewed gravity field wavered the grav-dial needles, we would have been crushed to a thin smear by the fearful power in the mighty jets of the *Black Prince* against the invisible wall of the rushing force that is gravity. But in those thin zones in the center of the attraction of two bodies, no matter how far off or how near, exist certain hard-to-find lines of neutralization of gravity where the opposed flows of gravitons leave a totally weightless line of no gravity. There a pilot can accelerate to the full power of a ship's generators, and the resulting velocity will not harm a fly after the acceleration is shut off. Neither can the acceleration harm anyone if it is applied in the exact center of the weightless zones. To do this fine calculation of position with respect to the invisible force fields of gravity merely by closely watching the wavering needles of the grav indicators, was a feat I had never seen attempted. But Firko had fine coordination of hand and eye, as well as the iron nerve the feat required, and we came through with nothing but a few bruises for the lot of us. Our nerves did not fare so well. I still tremble at the thought of those iron hands hurling our lives against the fearful force.

WE LANDED on Falnorn's glittering envelope of plastic, which sealed out the cold of space and sealed in the artificial warmth of the great heat generators of the surface. The reason for the variance from the traditional method of building far below the surface where the rock furnishes perfect insulation as well as warmth for the life within, was the fact that Firko's family, the Falnorns, were astronomers, students of the vast dark

spaces and the bodies that whirl forever through it,—and the dark caverns below the surface, while more practical for most life, were for them just so many more obstacles between them and their chosen calling. On Falnorn, alone of all the worlds of dark space I had seen, the dwellings were built on the surface.

Below, through the clear plastic roof of their world, we could see the tower² ing, black, almost cyclopean homes of the great family of Falnorn. For nearly all within the plastic shell of the world of Falnorn were relatives by blood or marriage. Strangely decorated in shining gold, the great black buildings were alien to us. Above us glowed the ruddy globe of Heavy Enn, ruddy because of the myriad of inner lit city globes, which were plastic globes over the great cavern city entrances—so many of them that the whole planet glowed redly from a distance. The light was red because the beneficial rays of the Enn beneficial were predominantly in the red of the spectrum.

We were admitted to the inner warmth under the insulating transparency by a great circular trap, that opened its disc ahead of the *Black Prince*. Gently the great bulk of our ship lowered toward the buildings beneath. About the alien beauty of the buildings was the familiar beauty of columnar cedars of great age, mirrored in the long ovals of reflecting pools. This place was beautiful with the work of an age of loving hands serving the Falnorns because they were proud of working for them.

The pools reflected, too, the far brilliance of the myriad stars, and the red globe overhead that was the monster world of Heavy Enn. But no one who has studied under the Gods of the Darkness can appreciate the light of stars with any ecstatic reaction, for he knows

the evil they bring to life under their light. Always in one's mind is a rebellion against the blind working of the dumb mechanisms of energy, bringing life into being on globes like the earth, where disintegrance from its evil sun makes all its days miserable and its end the horrible, leprous shriveling that is age. And on those cold worlds where disintegrance is a negligible quantity, there energy does not birth life spontaneously, for the frigid cold does not generate life. But deep in the caverns burrowed in the warm interior of such globes, it is perhaps there, in some similar natural cavern that life such as first led to man came into being, and from there spread to the evil swamps of the sun-blasted planets, and to the burning deserts where disintegrance rules life action.

BUT the brilliant ruddy globe of Heavy Enn overhead was not such a depressing sight as the far stars, glittering with the studding, inner lit glass covered entrances to the deep cavern homes. Enn was an inspiring sight above us, filling a good quarter of the sky, and bringing enticing visions of the beauty of the life that we should soon see there.

It is good to look at such a sight as Enn from afar, and know that every sparkling stud upon its mighty body is the entrance to a city swarming with life of the highest intelligence, life that will never die or cease to grow. The thought of the beauty of all the women in those cities and the knowledge that they are truly immortal—brings to consciousness the awareness that love, and immortality to enjoy it, are truly the goal of Gods, a goal they have won.

Firko led us into his home. A mighty, tissue-vibrating force shook us as we entered the vast chambers. I knew it was the chamber beneficial, here ex-

panded to fill all the chambers of the great buildings. What power in the generators that hummed under the great towers of the mighty structures! The ecstasy of entering beneficial force after the emptiness of the void of outer space is unexpressible.

About the corridors we traversed was a thing I had not seen before,—moving statues. They were tremendous, of some flexible glass-like stuff, and lit by the streams of invigorating vi-rays, of which they were the local source—as a radiator serves in an earth home. Their motile bodies moved slowly through an everlasting dance of ever more and more attractive form, and the statues were related by the pattern to each other, seeming to be an endless ballet along the corridors. The mechanisms of their motions could not be seen, as the translucent substance of the bodies was not quite revealing as to the core of them. This slow, interrelated motion of these breathtaking sculptures was the most interesting thing I saw on Falnorn, for we were not there for long.

FIRKO had sent ahead warning of the dangerous character of the infection we bore within us. So there was no life to be seen, and we knew that those parts of the buildings entered by us would be hermetically sealed after we had gone, and gassed heavily with disinfectant. We did not pause long to enjoy the beauty of our surroundings, for we all felt a lot like lepers stealing a way into paradise, and we did not feel particularly welcome.

Firko broke out several flacons of a potion he called "the perfection of a million years of difficult art—of an effort toward the complete nutrient." It was wonderfully flavored liquid, and we drank all we could hold. It gave us immediate strength, and more in-

tense and brilliantly colored thought than we had had for weeks. All of us had been dulled by the progressing fecundity of the numbers of multiplying micro-men within us.

Picking up certain instruments whose use I couldn't fathom, as well as spending some time checking over his data on the micro race with his father's talking image over the televisor, Firko led us at last out to the hangars again. Leaving the *Black Prince*, whose weight was too great to approach any heavy planet like Enn, we entered a smaller ship which seemed mainly made up of power generators and huge jets, and so upward again toward the ruddy sparkling globe of the mighty world called Enn above us.

Shortly we were spiralling slowly down toward one of the red glittering spots on Enn which were, in most cases, the entrances to the oldest cities in all this dark galaxy. Our ship, as it neared one vast city home of these oldest of Elders, seemed to me comparatively the size of a gnat making a landing on South America.

The vast, circular air lock doors gaped for us, and we were swallowed up in myriad overwhelming sensations as the mental examination of the watchers for the Gods of Enn sent the impressions from the God-minds over the telaug rays and gave us a swift glimpse of the scintillant, infinite beauty of the endlessly complex thought within their minds. This place was to Nor as a technological college is to a kindergarten.

CHAPTER VII

Vanue Falls into the Hands of the Jotuns

HOURS later Vanue awoke. After releasing her invisible race of micro-men upon whom she had spent so

many hours, hours which she had expected to be her last, she had at last lost consciousness from the inroads of the alien horde of savage life. Her last act had been to pull a hypodermic syringe full of the micro race of her own culture and plunge the teeming life into her own arm.

Sitting up, Vanue rose and stood before her great round mirror from the art-city Loni. Slowly her hands rose and began their habitual motions of dressing the vast cloud of fine-fibred, floating golden hair which was her delight and the envy of all the would-be beautiful of the Nor empire. The forms of her rounded shoulders, the great soft arms lifting and parting the strands of glimmering gold, were a pleasure to her in the shadowed round of the mirror. The green emeralds of her eyes watched with a strange new delight all the many beauties that made up the mighty unsurpassed splendour of symmetry that was Vanue. The soft delicate bloom of her skin, the long lashes shadowing her eyes, the great long-fingered hands that were so swift, so sure at their simple task—all seemed entirely new and unendingly delightful possessions to Vanue. The micro race she had bred and inserted in her own blood had never before been out of their crystal prison.

For the first time in weeks Vanue lifted her voice in song—

"I am Vanue, the flame of the mind's desire.

I am Vanue, the beauty of life's fierce fire.

*I sing awareness of my white body,
my round arms, long limbs and
soft hair—*

*I sing awareness of red lips, of
smooth cheeks, and a lover's
stare.*

*I sing of swift moving hands and
sure and graceful feet.*

*I sing Vanue, who was a slave, is
free for e'er!"*

Suddenly, as the meaning of her words sank into her newly awakened mind, Vanue started, and stared at herself in the great, shadowed roundness of the mirror. It was her voice, but she had never sung such a song, in praise of herself; she would not have thought it seemly. Her voice stopped in a sudden sound of glad surprise as she realized that her own race of little people had taken possession of her mind's cells, and the song had been their way of announcing their presence to her—and of their victory over the savage life that had been stealing her mind. The song was pure joy of living, and a song of freedom and gladness from the little people at finding their new home so entirely lovely.

So she was herself again, all the leaping joy of life again streaming through her veins, and more besides—a new glad awareness of self as of one just released from prison. The glad question formed on her lips and a soft little answer was born in her mind, deep in her inner self:

"We have released our mistress, and we will guard you always. O beloved Goddess, we dwell in you now, and always will love our home and guard its freedom which you gave us this night."

Her micro race had proved true, had proved able; and entered and freed her forever from the parasitic micro race which had nearly succeeded in robbing her of mental life, as they had done to nearly all of the Nor.

For the first time in weeks, hope lifted its head in her heart.

Failing to guess what might be awaiting her, Vanue dressed with care, and left her home . . .

Her destination was the great inner caverns where the supreme ruler of Nor

made his home and held his highest court. She could not understand why the usual emergency council of all the best minds of Nor had not been summoned. She felt it was her duty to consult with the ruler about the measures taken against the micro-invasion and to acquaint him with the success of her own efforts at finding a counter micro race to use against the invading parasitic race. She was also furious at the great Elder's order for her to cease these successful experiments, and meant to tell him off in her own way, now that she had succeeded in her experiments.

WHEN she entered the mighty 'chamber of the God-head's dwelling, she stopped short, aghast, and turned swiftly to retreat, but too late!

Seated before the great horseshoe tribunal where the mighty ruler held his court was an outlander. A forty-foot, monstrosously ugly fellow, black-bearded and swarthy. Before him a powerful telaug and visor had been set up, and with it he was watching the thought of the uniformed city guard, Nor men all. These he was using to police the deluded city. They were not free-thinking men any longer, but were under his control. Not as directly as the Nortan and Atlan method of overpowering thought augmentation imposed upon the mind—but indirectly, through the members of his micro race whom he had kept under micro wave compulsion for years, preparing for an event such as the taking of Nor city. By the use of his radio-controlled micro-men, he could keep those who followed him free of the wild, savage, parasitic micro-men he had loosed upon the city.

Vanue deduced the whole set-up as she looked at him and the tell-tale apparatus about him. Even as she looked, she felt the stings as millions of tiny craft entered her skin bearing the more

highly developed micro-men whom the Jotun Chief had brought under his control. Within her consciousness she sensed the fierce battle for possession of her mind and nerves going on between her own cultured micro race and those shock troops of the micro-invasion.

Within seconds she sank to the floor, her motor nerves cut by the new invasion of her body, but she was still conscious, for the new invaders were obeying the orders of the Jotun Chief over the telaug, and he did not wish her mind destroyed, as he wanted to watch her despair as she realized the hopelessness of the Nor position. Too, the micro race of her own creation were holding her mind centers valiantly, but the coincidence between the Jotun Chief's orders and their own attempt to protect Vanue's mind kept them from his notice. The black-bearded chief laughed triumphantly as the greatest beauty in all Nor sank helpless at his feet.

"So! The pride of the Nor finds her master—" his voice roared gleefully. "Take her to the women's quarters and put her into the super-stim, along with the others we are preparing for sale. She will have more regard for the Jotun, and less pride, when she has had a taste of Jotun science."

THE great court had been turned into a mad feasting room, with the best blood of all Nor as the slaves of the feast—slaves without mind except as the micro-men ruled them; ruled in turn by the strong waves of micro thought broadcast by the instruments of the Jotun leader.

Vanue had heard of the secret cruelty of the Jotuns—but now she realized what had been meant. The Jotuns, by their control of the minds of the Nor men, were making the great God-like

race kill each other in every vile way they could conceive.

Here, a Lord of a neighboring planet was ravishing his own daughter, while at the same time he was made to inject a rank poison into her veins from a huge syringe. Then both the victims were made suddenly aware of their acts by evacuating the controlled micro-men from their minds—too late. They saw the things they had done and their mental agony of horror at the acts of their own hands was greatly enjoyed by the sprawling Jotsuns over the powerful telaugs, which broadcast the whole thought sequence to their minds.

There a great oldster was operating on his own wife, pulling out her organs one by one and examining them with bloody, unfeeling hands, while her fully conscious screams rent the air; and as she died the Elder was made fully conscious of his acts—and the deluge of mental anguish made the Jotuns howl with laughter.

The smaller and more comely females had been put aside to be placed in culture fluid vats and wired to stimulative and nutrient growth promoting energy flows and vibrants, to develop them in the way that the Jotuns found most attractive in their women. Also many of them would find their way to the vast pleasure palaces which surround the civilized areas of space—to pander to the fierce lusts of the pioneers of space.

The Jotun women, who are not good looking enough for the pleasure palaces, as well as many of the victims of these palaces, are mindless creatures for the most part, but with vastly developed, over-developed emotions and desires from the concentrated growth rays and stimulating vibrants directed wholly at the nerves of pleasure. Under the potent growth methods the Jotuns had picked up about the borders of the technical civilizations, they did produce a fearful,

overwhelming development and a figure fiercely attractive to the savage wanderers of the far spaces—at the expense of their other qualities.

THROUGH the heavy murk that the debauch had made of the air of the great chamber moved the hapless Nortans on errands for the Jotuns, bearing drink or the fine, infinitely valuable portable stim devices which were a most sought-for product of Nortan science; also drugs of the endlessly stimulating and pleasant varieties known to the Nor, as well as special foods of a number of kinds, which had been collected from everywhere about the city for the use of these creatures. Moving aimlessly, some of the unfortunate Nortans had suffered great wounds which poured out their life blood over their heaving sides as they struggled on, dying even as they moved to serve their conquerors.

The peculiarly overdeveloped women of the Jotuns moved through the steamy atmosphere, smelling rankly of the powerful, exotic perfumes from the ends of space, that they had found in the Nor ladies' boudoirs and poured over themselves; embracing first this man, then that one, or one of the bemused Nortans; it made no difference, for the Jotuns are not moral.

The smoke of their cooking fires which they built anywhere, regardless of whether it would destroy a great painting or ruin a statue, contributed its part to the murk that swirled everywhere. Like the savages they were, everywhere was the smell of blood and the sprawled and pitifully mutilated bodies of the immortals of the fallen city of Nor. The stench from the unclean bodies of the savage invaders, with their children brawling and shrieking madly in their play through the whole mad scene, the smell of spilled

wines and medical health potions which the Nor make in endless and irresistible varieties, overpowered the senses. Again and again a strong mixed perfume from the body of some maniacally amorous Jotun woman looking for another, yet another partner, mixed with the mingled and opposed sensations through the god-like luxury of the chambers about the High Court, in a steam like turkish bath, or a night club gone mad.

THROUGH the eddying gloom of steam, the smoke, and the vapors of wine and perfume, moved the debauchees—who were rapidly becoming too drunk to walk. Still they moiled and crawled one over the other, seeking yet one more sensation, driven on by the powerful stim rays which the Jotuns had activated to their highest power. These stim machines were the most valued loot of the pirates. This powerful influence pervaded the steamy atmosphere with an irresistible impulse, a compulsion toward pleasure, driving the whole throng on and on to madder and madder longings for the satisfaction of the terrible urge which such stimulation arouses—ever the Jotuns crawled over one another like a moiling mess of mad beasts in some vast saturnalia.

Vanue, herself beginning to feel the terrible and unnatural strength of the pervading stimulating currents through all the conductive atmosphere and moisture-drenched air of the room, her mind staggering again into the blank darkness from the steady influx of the antagonistic micro life obeying the leader's command from the teleradio compulsion to destroy all Nor life, all Nor thought, to attack all things Nortan, had yet a horrified vision of what she would become in this pit of horror, for she knew there would be no end to this terrible way of life. From what she had heard of the Jotuns, it was their normal life.

They plunged into this sort of endless debauch under their unnaturally overpowered use of the stimulating rays whenever they got hold of the stim mechanisms and their debauchs lasted until the mechanisms wore out from overuse. It was their way of life, but this time she knew their Chief had engineered the death of the Nortan people in order to indulge his taste for unending debauch. She wondered dimly how many other lovely cities would be ravished by this particular bunch of pirates.

CHAPTER VIII

Mion and Firko on the Heavy Planet, Enn

FIRKO brought the tiny ship to rest on Heavy Enn, and I and Arl, and the maidens of Vanue eased ourselves painfully out, for the gravity of Enn is not for unaccustomed muscles.

They were awaiting us, and seemed not to have the fear of the infection which had characterized our landing on Falnorn, now but a shining blue dot below us. A party was going on, to welcome us; at least it seemed like a party to us, who did not know the life of Enn is an endless kind of Nirvana for all of them.

As we entered the vast chamber each of us was handed a tiny stimulator belt, which, at the press of a button, emanated a ray which exhilarated and communicated with the one aimed at. The huge chamber itself was loaded with conductive and stimulating vibrants of a vastly superior kind to those we were accustomed to, and I realized that Nor was really a "corny" backwater to the intense life of these greater Elder God races.

The animal magnetism of the throng, augmented by the devices in the belts we had been given, flooded the room

with the delightful sensing of the presence of the opposite sex. There were many there no larger than our own comparatively diminutive selves, but they were a minority—really but children. The odour music played its silent beauty, while a master-organ of both sound and basic vibrants of thought-record augments filled the place with both unobtrusive music and God-thought, woven into a pattern of meaning that was immense in its effect of something vastly greater than beauty.

A female friend of Firko's—a relative—took us in her huge hands and presented us to the larger of those present, the relatives of the families of Falnorn, for the most part.

The purpose of our visit—aid for the micro-invasion—formed the topic of most of the conversation around us, but why didn't they take it more seriously? I at first didn't understand it. Then I heard snatches of talk about the Small Focii experiment, and I realized that these were the people who were in on the secret of the existence of Small Focii, and hence were the only people who had no cause to fear a savage micro race, for their own highly cultured micro race would be able to protect them from any number of the savages. Besides, the danger from the tiny life was something they had foreseen for years and were prepared for.

THEIR micro race was a thing they had worked on for centuries, and the people they had created were from their own blood, the children of artificially created dwarfs, whose children were in turn treated both in the womb and in childhood, until at last they had what they wanted—a race small enough to enter the invisible world below magnification's reach. As the size had begun to be an obstacle in communication and in other ways, the tiny ones had

been trained in the administration of the growth retarding potions. This teaching was an essential part of "sending" into the small—a thing they knew would be of no use unless those sent into the small were trained scientists of several kinds.

As the little fellows grew, the process formed naturally into steps of sizes surrounding Small Focii. The whole experiment took up a vast cavern, roughly circular in shape, where as you progressed toward the center the people grew smaller and smaller, until, as you reached the center—that is, if you were allowed to enter—as no one of normal size was allowed to more than approach the entrance to the cavern of the small—you would have found a people of the size of ants, and in the very center of all, a place where nothing could be seen, but which was the crown of the whole effort—the people who had reached microscopic size.

As this small and smaller size was reached, the time element became involved, for the smaller men were, the swifter did they grow and reproduce. And in the ultra-small world the generations flashed by as one breathed a breath. Of course, these small creatures were also immortal under the conditions of life they had been taught to reproduce by the full-size men, and would gradually grow up out of their smallness and move out into the larger circles of life in the circular cavern. But this was not a problem as yet.

The enterprise was so young that there were no full-sized men yet evolved from the minute beginnings. It would take many thousands of years for the ultra-small men to grow into full-sized men. But size is so variant a thing on the Elder God planets that a standard size man is hardly a concept used by them. Size depends on several variable factors: the age-size of the parents at

birth, those parents' choice of nutrients and synthetic gland extracts for the young, as well as their choice and knowledge of the infinitely complex science which their beneficial ray development has become. There are beneficial rays which increase the health of a cell without influencing its size; others influence the growth of the cells. Then there are the synthetic gland products manufactured by the Elder God race. They can influence growth, intelligence and strength in the young by subjecting some glands and organs to a more intense radiation from beneficial energy flows.

IN THE ultra-small world within the sacred, rapidly evolving center of the cavern, age had absolutely no recognizable relation to anything one usually associates with age in man. This much I gathered from the conversation about the ultra-small world we were to visit—when a great Elder called Fantarn picked us up and started off with us to the very place my ears were endeavoring to learn about.

As he walked his great voice boomed above us:

"The micro-world is fast becoming the important part of our life—and we huge monsters are becoming but the agents and the robots of the smaller ones. We bear them about, we care for them, but they do the thinking and the accomplishment with their ultra-rapid thought, before we can even conceive what is happening. And when at last they grow up to God size from the small world again, they will be in truth Gods of wisdom, and not the great lumbering beasts we are become in our growth."

I piped a polite return to his great voice:

"The small men have need of our size—and our need of their rapidity of thought and science work will form a

bond between the two worlds. It should make a great race team, the macro-men and the micro-men—will it not, O mighty Elder?"

"They are developing a type of men that can live in our bodies as these men-germs you bear in your body can live, but without using our life force except as a hook to hang their dwellings upon. These parasites you bear and which are wiping out Nor city planet, are renegades from those experiments, who saw an easy way of life without effort, and fled by using their minuteness as a way of getting away. Where they have been since they fled we know not—but now they show up as horrible parasites, I gather that the micro race needs our size and ancient solidity of life pattern, and I shall make sure that they do not develop any such way of life. It is one reason I am taking you to Small Focii, to show them the actual living parasites you bear which once were men—but a short lifetime ago to us—but an eon to them. Mayhap the unwisdom of the results will teach others of them who are tempted to become parasites.

"Yes, we have a great need of them—and I am glad to have this to show them, so that they may become more aware of our wisdom, slow as it may seem to them. Yes, it will make a mighty life team. No microbe will have the effrontery to push a nose beneath the skin of a man so tenanted. After all, we can move a billion of their worlds with one hand. The Elder Empire will expand as never before, though perhaps to outward seeming we will not grow at all. We are learning to make the most of what we have now, and the outward growth into space, with all its inconvenience of adoption to heavier and heavier worlds—will cease. When it comes again we will be faced by no enemies capable of stopping us, and

by no inconvenience—for we will have by then developed inner strength and resilience that will make our limbs able to bear the step by step progress. In time the use of heavier and heavier planets to bear us may cease altogether, as more and more of our children enter the small worlds instead of choosing full size life. Our problems will be much simplified."

SMALL Focii itself was but a block of marble, ten or twelve feet by twenty, and as wide. Over it glowed several great lamps of the red beneficial of Enn, and down upon it streamed a vaporized bath of nutrients. The formulas for both these beneficial rays and the nutrient vapor were numerous, and had been worked out by the small people and put into operation over the block of marble. Within it we knew a myriad of minute people lived—each molecule a home—or in the size range developing now, perhaps a planet full of people lived in each molecule. Around the block a fury of work went on. Ant sized people worked at apparatus too small to make out, and handed up to bird size people a steady stream of tiny papers, which they in turn copied and handed up to cat size people, and so on. They were copying and enlarging photostats of documents, formulas, books of philosophy, and systems of philosophy (which occupied a large part of the time of the little people, in their attempts to improve the logic of the big people, who were a worry to them, with their poorly patterned and apparently so slow thought, with its ill-formed patterns which they heard constantly over their tiny telaugs, the size showing up all defects to their microscope mental vision in a most revealing light).

One of our first comments to the little people was that they should organize

an expedition to go into the minds of the particular great people who were such illogical thinkers and correct the illogical condition in person—with or without the knowledge of the patient. They made no answer, but I could not help but think that they must have thought favorably of the suggestion.

As an answer they sent up a small bit of material for both Arl and myself. With it was a sheet of instructions: "Place these bits of rock in an enduring gold sheathing, such as a locket or ring, and wear it constantly. A coronet is the perfect thing for the body position of the tiny race we have sent into your care. When things go ill with you, the tiny race within the gold ornament will hear of it and find a way out of your troubles for you. These are real good luck charms; they are a nation given into your keeping. You will never lack for correct thought on a problem before you—so long as you care for this gift. In effect it is an ultra-rapid, auxiliary brain—which is in truth many, many brains, whose time is so much more rapid than your own that many lives can be spent by them upon a problem taking you but seconds to propound. The container of the homes of the little ones must be bathed regularly in certain nutrients and placed under certain beneficial rays for a time."

ARL and I were soon quicker of thought, and we had not even mentioned the plague we bore within us; but I could vision the battle going on within my body as my old quickness returned.

Then came what we were so impatiently awaiting—a series of similar bits of matter for Firko, who had had his own reports of the micro-invasion photographed and sent down to the little ones. The instructions went to him

and he tarried no longer in this so pleasant atmosphere. He remembered the straits in which he had left Vanue, with her fate in the efforts of her own hands, and little chance of success. The little people seemed to have given him some kind of assurance that he would need no more, for he did not wait for an expedition which was forming to go to the aid of Nor, but leaped into the tiny ship we had arrived in—and we after him.

The time we took in burning the ether to Falnorn was negligible, but somehow as long, quite as long, as I care to spend hurtling between two worlds at such an uncomfortable speed. Into the *Black Prince* we piled, and off into the night that has no end. Firko reduced the time of our trip another fraction of time, but we were sorely bruised by the acceleration bursts, which he could stand easily, for we were not so tough.

CHAPTER IX

Mutan Mion Returns to a Fallen Nor

THE *Black Prince* swept in a great spiral to the frozen valley above Nor. The locks that should have opened for us opened not; there was no friendly beam bearing laughing conversation to us, no movement or loved voices to be noted anywhere below. We settled to earth, the liquid air flying in great spumes about us, and putting on space suits, with long and sorrowful faces we prepared to enter the unopened gates of Nor. We all knew that only the greatest of calamities could have caused such negligence. The race must be dead—the powerful, immortal race of the Nor must have succumbed to the tiny invaders without a chance to struggle.

We struggled with the tiny individual

locks which are always at the side of the great space lock valves. Without too much quibble I burned the lock out in the swift arc of a dis-ray. Once in, we opened the great discs for the *Black Prince*, and the ship floated slowly in with a quiet that accented the heavy funereal feeling that pervaded everything.

I leaped to the great vision ray, and swung it from its position staring at the skies, to sweep the inner caverns. Nor was a city of walking dead. About the streets staggered and plodded a few of the mightiest men of Nor, but their faces were blank and foolish. They were not men at all, but empty headed wrecks.

Not waiting for any more ceremony, I opened the valves of the inner locks, and boarding again the *Black Prince*, we set her gliding rapidly above the cavern city, looking with sick eyes at the death of all we had held dear for so long. The place was untouched by signs of struggle, but there were hardly any people to be seen about. With the penetra, we found most of the missing sitting in their homes, motionless, staring at nothing. Within their minds our telaug beams found no thought at all. They would all die from lack of volition if help did not come to them soon.

As we floated the big ship down the streets, we saw entirely too many Jotuns. I counted hundreds of the creatures, before I suddenly realized that the great number of Jotuns and their healthy appearance was significant beside the wretched, stumbling, mindless wrecks which were the remnants of the Nor.

THERE was no place to set the huge ship down in the streets, so we finally put the *Black Prince* on the sod before the massive pillars of the High Court. In and out of the great open

valves of the doors poured a throng of Jotuns. Many of them were drunk, and none of them were respectful as we pushed our way through them into the great hall. On the High Seat of the Mighty Elder of all Nor sat a Jotun. About the great, luxurious place—the architectural crown of the effort of an immortal race—reeled a mob of drunken Jotuns. Every man's arm was about a beauty of Nor, and every man's foot was in the face of a prostrate Nortan. If they were not prostrate it would have been better if they had been, for they were shuffling about in answer to the bawled orders of their masters, and every time they passed a Jotun, they got a kick—which added up to more punishment than lying on the floor.

As they entered the great room, Firko's huge body jutting out of the swirling mob, the monstrous Jotun on the high seat saw him, and bawled: "Disarm those men—are you all drunk? Hop to it!" About them flashed into action the great flame swords worn by the Jotuns.

"Back to the ship!" Firko's mighty voice bellowed and his dis-gun needed swiftly right and left. The lancing fires of the flame swords burned past us, but the consummate swiftness that was Firko's heritage from his great parents kept his swift ray always a hair ahead of the clumsier Jotun weapon, and as they backed from the great doorway a ray from the black hulk of the *Black Prince* blotted out the life pouring from the entrance—blotted the Jotuns out in a great burst of fierce, sparkling dis. We raced up the spider walk into the lock of the *Black Prince*, and the jets knocked great holes in the smooth lawn as the ship shot into the ways again. If we had known Vanue was among the victims of that stew of lust in the great court building, would we have fled

—or sat right there and shot it out? I think Firko would have died before he left them the field, with Vanue a prisoner. We shot through the tubes at reckless speed. They were not built for either the speed or the size of the ship Firko piloted, but his seemed a sure hand at any job.

We swung into the great tubes that led to Vanue's home, and settled softly upon the roof of her palace. The place was a wreck. It had been ransacked from the upper sleeping chambers to the storehouses in the basement, and sprawled among the wreckage of the looters were a dozen fat and ugly Jotun women, sleeping off the effects of a prolonged indulgence in nutrient potions, liquors, and overpowered stim.

Above us the great space radio of the *Black Prince* went into action, broadcasting the information over a dozen bands used by the space patrol as well as commercial lines. About us the crew of the ship moved swiftly, setting up battle ray from the store-rooms—making of the place a fortress.

Firko went back to the ship on the roof and sent a code message to be relayed by any ship within hearing, to Enn. I did not doubt that that message meant the end of the race of the Jotuns, wherever the mighty reach of the vast Elder Planet's League, of which Enn was not a small member—could find them.

CHAPTER X

Vanue Among the Jotuns

AMONG the Jotuns, Vanue's awakened brain was again darkening into the imbecility that the savage little slaves of the Jotun leader brought so quickly to those his thought indicated as victims. They did this by

infesting the brain cells with millions upon millions of their colonies—propelled invisibly through the air by their tiny crystal ballships. Once in the brain, they cut into all the nerve cells of the nerve fibers connecting the brain cells—so that thought ceased in the infected brain. The brain cells were not destroyed, but they were unable to communicate with other brain cells—and thought is not the product of a single cell, but the multi-product of millions of brain cells adding up their life experience in ultra-rapid communication.

Vanue's last thoughts were directed toward the race of tiny men whom she had developed in her own laboratories, and whose efforts had freed her once before from the mind-darkening invaders. What had happened to them? Had they been overwhelmed by the savagery and numbers of these micro-men who were closest to the source of the evil will behind the micro-invasion of Nor life?

Even as she questioned herself her answer came, for without volition of her own she caught up a harp where it lay in the litter of the floor and a song lifted on the noisome air of the great hall.

*"Flames and blood, war and death—
Normen taste the dark waters of
Lethe—
But Nor shall rise again!"*

As her clear and God-lovely voice lifted over the hubbub of the debauch, within her mind the shadows lifted slowly and clear thought began to flow again within her. She realized that the little race who had taken up their life within her body had been but temporarily set back by the vast numbers of the invaders. She would have given a dozen pearls from Lae to have seen that war

within her body on the augmentor of thought images.

The race she had developed must in truth be vastly superior to that brought by the Jotuns, for they had not taken long to clear her mind of the second thought-eclipsing invasion.

AS FENRIR, the Jotun Chief, heard her voice, his anger rose.

"Take her to the woman's quarters, I say. What means this delay?"

Vanue was borne from the room just before the entrance of Firko and the Nor men. This brief but fierce encounter was followed by sudden activity by the Jotuns. Fenrir realized his life depended on the events of the next few hours, for his hold upon Nor rested wholly on keeping the state of affairs in the city a secret from the rest of the Empire and the Nor-patrol. Fenrir was but little acquainted with the fact of the existence of the Elder League, of which Enn was a member. He had no real education, and the vastness of the civilization of which Nor was but one small part was not a thing he could conceive or grasp.

The Jotuns leaped to man the rays which were in great war-ray rooms everywhere about the vast caverns, of which the Nor court was the center. Great bolts of flame and lightning darted after the departed *Black Prince*, but the ship was not built on Nor and seemed impervious to their fire, if indeed they struck the target. A great black cone of "shorter" protected the ship's flight, and their rays did not pierce that cone of power.

"Jotuns are coming from all our holdings in space to live in Nor; we will not be alone to face the power that ship will summon," growled the Jotun Chief, but he was shaking with fear. That ship, and its escape from their clutches, was the slip he had not intended to make.

But his undisciplined men had been drunk and not at their posts, or it would never have landed unobserved. The Jotun betook himself to the chambers of the women to console himself with the beautiful Nortan, Vanue.

IN THE women's quarters Vanue had been placed upon a table and over her the greatest stim rays the Jotuns had found in the city were activated. Such had been the Chief's orders, and the women of the Jotuns do as they are told. The terrible current poured through her body with its overwhelming command to the organs and nerves, a command far superior to the will in strength. Her body writhed slowly into rhythmic motions, and sweat broke out on her noble face as she resisted the overpowering synthetic nerve impulses with every atom of strength in her power.

Again and again her strong and huge arms broke the straps that bound her to the "forcing table," but the numbers of the Jotun men and women about were too much for even her great God-strength. They only bound her again under the mighty rays and watched her utterly perfect body as the stimulation of the nerves went on and on, building up within her body a vast potential of energy, unnatural but overwhelming to the will.

Fenrir entered, rubbing his hands together at sight of the writhing body of Vanue. A fit sacrifice to the Gods who had brought his great success upon him; a fit reward for all he had accomplished lately; the finest booty in all Nor, the famous Vanue—his to do with as he wished. He was but half her size, and utterly hideous to her eyes.

Hideous as it was to her, her body was his; that body she had preened so long, knowing that one day it would be irresistible to some mighty one from

the Elder planets. And now Firko had come, seeking a fit mate in the famous Vanue, and finding her all that fame had painted her. Her own heart had found at last the perfect counterpart for which she had prepared herself for centuries. Now the effort of all that time and life had to go—to this mongrel from the pits of Jotun filth. Tears of rage blinded her.

CHAPTER XI

The Battle for Nor City

THE SPACE radio was belching replies from a thousand separate space stations as the unbelievable news of the degradation and eclipse of the Nor state reached them.

"We will arrive as fast as drivers will place us there."

"We will scuttle those vermin's bid for power if it is the last thing we do."

"Hold that Vanue home—we will be there within an hour."

On and on went the furious words from the farflung ports of all space—and I realized that only the stupid Jotuns were capable of putting themselves on as hot a spot as that group within the capitol chambers now sat upon.

But some of them warned us—"The Jotuns are numerous, and may have been preparing this coup for many years—their ships are seen and reported from many places—all headed for Nor planet. Do not make any more mistakes."

He warned them all in turn of the micro race which had been the weapon to turn the Nor race into slavish imbeciles—and at least we knew that no more opportunity would be given to a Jotun to infect a civilized man with the savage little beings who had laid low the lords of all Nor's empire.

So it was that space around the planet

Nor became a Hell of blazing rays, a tornado of battling ships, as the Jotuns arrived from their hidden holes, and the Nor-patrol ships, as well as friendly warships from a dozen smaller nations streamed steadily in to take a hand. The groups of fighting forces were not evenly matched; there was no way to tell who had the power. The ancient ships of the Jotuns performed surprisingly well. It was evident they had been preparing this coup for some time. But as the flow of ships from all civilized space kept increasing, the influx of greedy Jotun looters decreased, for news travels fast, and they had no stomach for a fight to the finish.

We watched the whirl of battling spacers from our visions screen in Vanue's home—itching to get the *Black Prince* out and into it—but knowing the place we held would be needed as a base for operations against the Jotun-held great borings of the court buildings.

AS THE incoming friendly ships reached the proportions of an overwhelming avalanche of strength, the Jotun ships broke their clumsy formation and fled in every direction—and the pursuing, faster and lighter ships of the Patrol cut them down. At last the skies above Nor were clear again. The Jotun rebellion was over. Clever from beginning to end, as their attempt had been, they had made the Nor look foolish to all the peoples of space. It would be an age before the prestige of the Nor had regained its former value. I for one suspected it would do them much good to realize that for every lock there is a key—and for every man a fatal weakness. Our weakness had been our overconfidence, resulting in laxity and failure to foresee trouble when it stared us in the face. It would be a long time before Nor lifted that over-proud head again.

Now came trundling down the ways the ranks of the patrol; small ray tanks from the ships; great tanks from the cities' arsenals; and over them drifting the great bulks of the smaller patrol vessels which were small enough to enter the standard size borings of the great cavern city.

Within hours from the time we sent the first message announcing Nor's plight, the court borings were completely sealed off, and the ray tanks creeping closer and closer to the great doors. Out of the pillared buildings flamed steadily the defensive ray with which the place was equipped, but our "shorter" rendered it valueless to the Jotuns.

Then the Jotuns tried the weapon which had given into their hands the great lords of Nor: the tiny glittering marbles which housed the myriads of micro-men. These they sent on tiny mechanical airplanes which they had evidently long prepared for the purpose—and I knew it was their belief that we would fall before it as had the great and ancient rulers in the High Court. But we were well warned—and as the tiny planes swept toward us, dropping the glittering marbles of mind-destroying life, our needle rays sought out the planes and burned them down. From every hand ray in the army about us flamed upward the dis-needles, and the swarms of glittering little mechanical birds never reached a man of the army, with the monstrous micro-life.

AS THE planes fell, their load of venom spilled out over the soils of Nor, but watchful eyes swept the area of the infection again and again with flaming dis at full strength, and every falling plane met earth only to be blasted to fragments and the earth burned away for many yards where it fell. If any of the micro race lived, they

weren't numerous enough to cause us injury. Ever closer and closer to the great doors our ray tanks rolled, and the black curtain of "shorter" before the doors began to glow lighter and lighter as the overload burned away the ground connections, unit after unit.

Now our dancing dis-needles from the small tanks had started their dance of unison. Their concentrated fire would lance here and there together—never where the Jotuns would expect it—and every time the needles met at the base of a blazing lance of ray—that time one ray crew of Jotuns died—cut in two by the irresistible force of many rays meeting in one point. There was possible to science no defense against such tactics but greater agility of hand in meeting the force needles with greater "shorter" force concentrations—and this mass fencing of many rays and "shorter" beams to protect or penetrate is one of the most thrilling sights of ray warfare; utterly unpredictable and utterly disastrous if the defending hands are slower than the attackers. The Jotuns were slower, it appeared. It was not long before their defenses were down; the great valves swung open before us as a magnetic ray behind us pulled on the metal of the doors.

The heavily armored ray tanks lumbered slowly into the great court room, grinding in short circles as their periscopes peered for the defenders. They were few—and they stood with their weapons piled before them, their hands crossed on their chests—the customary posture of surrender. Everywhere lay the swarthy, ugly, bandylegged bodies of the Jotuns, and also everywhere lay the white bodies of the mightiest men of all Nor, now fallen. For the Jotuns had used the mindless captives as fighters, manning the rays with the "things" they had made of Gods.

Firko found Vanue, still bound to the

great forcing table, the stim rays going full blast. But Vanue was unconscious and moaning from the effect of the terrific over-stimulation. As Firko took the mighty beauty of my leader in his arms, tears coursed down my cheeks, for Vanue opened her eyes—and her eyes were sane and full of that balanced self that I worshipped.

SOME time later, when the mess had been cleared up and Nor was beginning to look as though people lived in it again, Vanue, Arl and myself were discussing the peculiar weakness of the Nor race as it had shown itself in this micro-invasion. Arl got the bit between her teeth and you should have heard her:

"Vanue, the Nor are stuck on themselves—and they are not what they think they are. Something vital is missing from the make-up of the state. It lacks some vital element. They despised the crude and ugly Jotuns for years—and one ship-load of Jotuns take the whole capital apart and nearly took over the government of Nor. Regardless of the fact that Nor was taken by a stratagem and not by open assault, my eyes are opened. Nor has been good to me—you are my ideal of a leader—but my eyes are opened. I am going with Firko to his home near Enn and I am going to learn what ails such states as Nor, and I am going to learn enough to do something about it. And until I know that Nor is really superior to such things as the Jotuns, in every way—I am going to have nothing more to do with her. Even if only with some of the micro race you have given me—I am going to create a perfect state—and one in which a swelled head will never grow."

I admire Arl's spunk when she gets riled—and her sentiments were nearly my own. There was too much official

"ivory tower" about Nor leaders' thought, too much indolence and pleasure seeking in their make-up. There was too much keeping of official science secrets from the minds of people who could have developed such things—too much static force about Nor thought. So I agreed with Arl, particularly as I had no intention of losing her.

"I agree wholly with my wife's statements," I said, winking slightly at Vanue, "and I am going to Enn with her—to protect her from any ideas that I, too, have a swelled head and am really inferior to a Jotun. That is, providing Firko will have me."

Firko laughed and answered, "You are all welcome in my home Falnorn—for as long as you wish to stay—be it days or centuries. But just what makes you think that Vanue is staying here in ravished Nor? My wife is not going to be allowed to stay in a place which has failed to protect her from—of all things—a Jotun. She has agreed to accompany me to Falnorn and take up her duties as my wife and the queen of my board. So, if you do not wish to leave your loved leader, I see no other course open to those who love Vanue but to accompany her to my home—until that day comes when Nor needs us again.

Vanue smiled her great smile that makes every man's knees shake who sees it, and lifted her glass.

"To our future; may it grow till we can say—we are truly superior to the Jotun race."

SADLY we drank to the death of the swelled head of the Nortans, and to our future under Vanue and Firko of Falnorn. For a great part of the Nor men of the city were dead—and the rest would not be of much account for a long time. Perhaps the straight

view of our duty was to stay and help rebuild the city, but so many other angles entered into our calculations. It was better for all of us to leave the scene of the death of so many beloved—but in each of our hearts was the resolve to return when we had the knowledge necessary to rebuild Nor as it should be rebuilt. And there was truth in our sad renunciation of the famous Nortan pride—for in truth it had had a fatal weakness, and the Jotuns had unerringly sensed this weakness. That weakness was the over-confidence that left the nerve center of all Nor open to such a simple subterfuge as dumping a few quarts of fierce micro-organisms in the air intakes of the central government buildings. That all Nor should have been fooled by the appearance of stupidity natural to the Jotuns—that their minds should have been so uninteresting to all Nor men as to have caused the failure to perceive the sinister intents motivating them—that Jotun junk ships should have penetrated the Nor patrol to the very gates of Nor city—all these things had turned my love and admiration for the Nor race into a wonder and hatred of the kind of thought which had produced such weakness. A self disgust that I myself had thought the Nortan system of life so perfect; that those Elders whom I had worshipped as Gods so short a time ago, should now be dead at the hands of Jotun idiocy had made me hate and fear all evil—yes—but it had also made me fear and dispise soft, easy life and ways of thought that left no room for caution. Well, a burned child dreads the fire, and is careful around a fire thereafter. I hoped the whole race of the Nortans realized the significance of this affair and learned from it never to underestimate an enemy or omit a precaution. Myself still followed the ascendant star

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Illustrated by MOREY



OMEGA, the MAN

By LOWELL HOWARD MORROW

THis story is science fiction in the epic tradition. The tremendous power of the plot is generated by its fundamental truth. The story is so strong that one has to step back a pace to focus on the allegory.

In the parched Earth of tomorrow, the end-product of man's evolution and culture, the last remaining man and woman, fight a grim battle with a prehistoric beast for possession of the only remaining body of water on the planet. This is a war between a supremely intelligent creature with all the techniques of science at his command and a nearly mindless brute with only physical power and instinct to guide it and yet we see the battle is far from unequal.

The contest is so thrilling and the contrast so vivid, that as events unfold we lose sight of the fact that what is involved is simply man against nature. Regardless of how far man progresses, the struggle will never cease.

If nature were all man had to fight, the issue would be clear cut, but as the story progresses

we realize that events symbolize man's own prodigality. His unthinking waste of natural resources and the overpowering realization that ultimately his own creations point the path to his extinction.

There are some weak premises in the science of the story but there are also some very brilliant ones. This author in 1932, sure-footedly traces the future of mankind; predicts the precise utilization of atomic energy; the population pressures that drove men out to the planets; the evolutionary changes that would occur in the human body due to the increasingly artificial mode of life and such a richness of other speculation that the very thoroughness of it threatens to detract from the story.

Previous to Omega, The Man, all but one of Lowell Howard Morrow's stories had dealt with man's future in the atmosphere and were contributed to AIR WONDER STORIES. They had been adequate for the time but scarcely distinguished. Omega, the Man was his last contribution to any

science fiction magazine and it was as though it represented the cumulative total of his imagination fitted into one package.

The immediate effect of the story was so great that the leading science fiction fan magazine of the period, FANTASY MAGAZINE, solicited from Mr. Morrow an article titled *The Story Behind the Story of "Omega, The Man,"* which it published in its June, 1934 number. The story grew out of a dream of "Indefinable, mysteries and awful monsters crawling, twisting squirming out of the horizon of darkness . . . With grey dry lips that smacked open and shut with grisly clatter . . . these creatures writhed toward a common center—the earth's last water—

cupped in the bed of a vanished sea. Then suddenly there appeared the wan figure of a man. Alone, majestic in his might as the last lord of all, he rose from beside the lake." The dream was based on Morrow's return to the lakes of Northern Michigan that he remembered as a child, to find them swamps or entirely dry.

"Knowing that all earthly life must eventually come to an end it has been one of my pleasant diversions to wonder about it. I have tried to picture the last of humanity following the receding waters across the hot sands, to speculate about the nature of the last man, to read his thoughts as he comes to stand alone in that abysmal moment of life's extinction." The results are memorable.

THE silver airship cut swiftly through the hot thin air. The noonday sun blazed down upon it and the desert world below. All about was the solemn silence of death. No living thing appeared either in the air or on the drab, gray earth. Only the aircraft itself displayed any signs of life. The sky, blue as indigo, held not the shadow of a cloud, and on the horizon the mountains notched into it like the teeth of a giant saw.

The airship finally came to a hovering stop, then dropped rapidly toward the salt-encrusted

plain. It came to rest at last on the bottom of a great, bowl-shaped hollow situated at the end of a chasm whose gray, rock-strewn sides rose in rugged terraces for miles back into the sky. In a few moments a panel in the vessel's side rolled noiselessly upward, disclosing a brilliant light, and from the interior of the airship soon appeared two figures who paused at the aperture and gazed out over the parched earth. Then without fear or visible effort—although they were seventy-five feet above the ground—they emerged from the

ship and floated down to earth.

These two humans—the sole survivors of all earth's children—were man and wife—Omega and Thalma. They were burned a deep cherry by the fierce rays of the sun. In stature they were above the average man now on earth. Their legs were slender and almost fleshless, because for many centuries man had ceased to walk. Their feet were mere toeless protuberances attached to the ankle bone. Their arms were long and as spare as their legs, but their hands, although small, were well-proportioned and powerful. Their abdominal regions were very small, but above them were enormous chests sheltering lungs of tremendous power, for thus nature had armored man against the rarefaction of the earth's atmosphere. But the most remarkable parts about this truly remarkable couple were there massive heads set upon short, slim necks. The cranial development was extraordinary, their bulging foreheads denoting great brain power. Their eyes—set wide apart—were large and round, dark and luminous with intelligence and their ears were remarkably large, being attuned to all the music and voices of life. While their nostrils were large and dilated, their mouths were very small, though sensuous and full-lipped. They were entirely hairless—for even the

eyebrows and the eyelashes of man had entirely disappeared ages before. And when they smiled they betrayed no gleam of teeth, for nature had long discarded teeth in man's evolution.

The great, silver ship of the sky, now rested in a deep pocket on the floor of an ancient sea. Millions of years, under the sucking energy of the sun and the whip of many winds, had sapped its waters, until only a shallow, brackish lake remained. Along the shores of this lake, which covered scarcely more than a hundred acres, a rim of yellowish, green grass followed the water's edge and struggled against the inevitable, and here and there among the grasses flowers of faded colors and attenuated foliage reared their heads bravely in the burning sunshine. And this lone lake, nestled in the lowest spot among the mountains and valleys which once flooded the Pacific, now held the last of earth's waters. Barren and lifeless the rest of the world baked under a merciless sun.

NOW clasping hands, like children at play, Omega and Thalma approached the lake. They glided over the ground, merely touching their feet to the highest points, and finally stopped with their feet in the warm, still water.

Omega ran his cupped hand through the water, then drank eagerly.

"It is good," he said in a low, musical voice. "And there is much of it. Here we may live a long time."

Thalma laughed with sheer joy, her large, red-rimmed eyes aglow with mother light and love.

"I am glad," she cried. "I know that Alpha will be happy here."

"It is so, my love, and—"

Omega checked and stared out over the glassy lake. A spot in its center was stirring uneasily. Great bubbles rose to the surface and eddied to one side, then suddenly huge cascades of water shot into the air as if ejected by subterranean pressure. As they stared in silent astonishment the commotion suddenly ceased and the surface of the lake became as tranquil as before.

"There is volcanic action out there," said Omega fearfully. "At any time the ground may open and engulf the lake in a pit of fire. But no, that cannot be," he added, staring at Thalma an odd light in his eyes. For he suddenly recalled that no volcanic action or earth tremor had disturbed the surface crust for ages.

"What is it, Omega?" she whispered in accents of awe.

"Nothing to fear, my dear, I

am sure," he replied, averting his eyes. "Likely some fissure in the rock has suddenly opened."

And then he embraced her in the joy of new-found life. For long ages mind had communicated with mind by telepathic waves, speech being used for its cheer and companionship.

"We will make ready for Alpha," said Omega joyfully. "In very truth he may be able to carry on. Moisture may return to earth, and it is more likely to return here than elsewhere. Remember what the Mirror showed last week over the Sahara plains—the makings of a cloud!"

They cheered each other by this remembrance how just before they had consumed the last of the water in their recent home and buried the last of their neighbors and friends the reflecting Mirror had brought a view of a few stary wisps of vapor above the Great Sahara which once had been reclaimed by man, where teeming millions in by-gone ages had lived their lives.

"The inclination of the earth's axis is changing as we know," he went on hopefully as they turned back toward the ship. "The moisture may come back."

His was the voice of hope but not of conviction. Hope, planted in man's soul in the beginning, still burned brightly in these last stout hearts.

Alpha was still unborn. Omega and Thelma had willed a male child. In him was to be the beginning of a new race which they hoped with the aid of science would repeople the earth. Hence his name, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, of which "omega" is the last.

"I am afraid, my love," said Thelma, looking back over her shoulder at the placid lake. "I wonder what heaved the water about that way."

"Don't worry about it, my dear," he said as they paused beneath the ship and he put his arm protectingly about her. "As I have said, it probably was the shifting of a rock on the bed of the lake. It is nothing to worry about, and I feel that we have nothing to fear for a long, long time. And we have so much joy to look forward to. Remember Alpha is coming, and think of his glorious future! Think of his changing all this!" And he swept his hand toward the grim, gray hills. "Just think of again gardenizing the world!"

IT was indeed a dreary view upon which they gazed. On every side, upon the mountains and hills, over salt-encrusted plains and upon the rocks, were the skeletons and shells of departed life. Fossils of the animal and the vegetable kingdoms greeted one on every hand. Great

fronds of palms of the deep, draped with weird remains of marine life long extinct, stood gaunt and desolate and rust-covered in the hollows and on the hills. Long tresses of sea weed and moss, now crisp and dead as desert sands, still clung in wreaths and festoons to rock and tree and plant just as they had done in that far-off age, when washed by the waters of the sea. Great forests of coral, once white and pink and red with teeming life but now drab and dead, still thrust their arms upward, their former beauty covered and distorted by the dust of the ages. Whales and sharks and serpents and fish of divers species' and sizes, together with great eels and monsters of the deep, lay thickly over the land, their mummified remains shriveled by the intense heat, their ghastliness softened by the ashes of the years.

Millions of ages had rolled away since the struggle began—the battle of life on earth against the encroachments of death. And now death stalked everywhere, grinning with malicious triumph, for he had but one more battle to fight. Already his grisly clutch was closing on the standard of victory. Man had mastered life but he had not conquered death. With the magic wand of science he had reached out into space and viewed the

life of far-off worlds. He had routed superstition and fear and selfishness. He had banished disease and learned all nature's secrets; had even visited other worlds and had come to know and understand his God, but still death had marched grimly on. For even the abysmal moment of creation had marked the world for his prey. Slowly but surely death had closed his cold hands about the earth. The sun flung forth his hot rays and drew more and more of the earth's moisture and dissipated it in space. Gradually the forests vanished and then the streams and lakes dwindled and disappeared. By this time the atmosphere had thinned almost imperceptibly—and only by the aid of his scientific instruments had man been able to detect its thinning. Less and less rain fell, and finally even the ice-caps about the poles trickled away. Cold and gaunt and shadowy those regions lay silent and lifeless throughout the long nights, and loomed like gray ghosts in the hushed light of the summer. The sun blazed on relentlessly and the shores of the seven seas receded age after age, but with his science and his machines man had doggedly followed the retreating waters, husbanded and harnessed them and thus retained his grip on life.

But now at last life on earth had come to its final battlefield.

The plans of the battle were sharply drawn, but there could be no doubt of the issue. No one knew this better than Omega, for the sun shone on with undiminished power. Yet the rotation of the earth had slackened until twenty-five hours constituted a day, while the year was 379 days and a fraction in length. Man, gradually adjusting himself to the new conditions and environment, had triumphed even in the face of a losing fight. For he had learned to smile into the hollow sockets of death, to laugh at the empty promises of life.

BACK in their ship Omega and Thalma gazed out over the dead world, where the salt crystals gleamed and sparkled in the sunshine.

"Will all this ever become green again and full of joy and life?" asked Thalma wearily.

"Why not?" asked Omega. "Although the race has come to its last stand, water is here and before it is gone who knows what may happen?"

Omega spoke only to please his wife, for well he knew in his heart that the star of hope had forever set. And always he was thinking of that commotion in the waters of the lake. What could have caused it? What did it portend? He was sure that the answer was to be one of tragedy.

"We know that for uncounted

ages the world was green and beautiful, was vibrant with life and joy," he went on. "And why may it not be so again, even though now it is garbed in the clothes of the sepulchre? Let us trust in the power of our son."

Thalma did not answer, and Omega, seeing that she was terribly depressed, fell silent. So they sat in their great airship, strangely dejected despite the close proximity of the life-giving water, while the sun flamed through the cloudless sky and set in a crimson flood beyond the lifeless plains. Night fell but still they sat brooding. The stars shone out in the purple heavens, but they noticed not their glory. The ship was wrapped in an awful silence. No night wind whispered its message nor warmed the cold, desolate earth, stretching down from the poles, nor cooled the hot wastes about the equator. The naked mountains rose stark and forbidding into the sky, which hung like a great, bejeweled bowl over the sun-scorched plains, where the dust of many ages lay undisturbed. The shadows lay deep and dark over the valleys and among the streets of cities dead and silent for many ages, and searched out deep chasms which when the world was young had felt the surge of the restless seas. No form of life winged its way through the darkness and called to its

mate. No beast of prey rent the air with its challenge. No insect chirped. No slimy shape crawled over the rocks. Dark and solemn, mysterious and still, the earth sped on through the night.

* * *

Morning found them in much better spirits. Over their breakfast, which consisted almost wholly of food in tablet form, they discussed their plans. After which they went to the lookout in the bow of the ship and gazed out at the gray world. There was no change. The same heart-breaking monotony of death confronted them. But despite it all they finally smiled into each other's eyes.

"It is home," said Omega proudly. "The last home we shall ever know."

"My God, look!" suddenly gasped Thalma, clutching his arm and pointing a trembling finger toward the lake. "What—is that?"

Following her gesture he stared in terror and stupefaction. Rising above the center of the lake where the day before they had beheld the agitated waters, was an enormous, scale-covered neck surmounted by a long, snake-like head whose round, red eyes were sheltered beneath black, horny hoods. The horrible creature's head was swaying back and forth as its

black tongue darted in and out between wide-open jaws displaying single rows of sharp teeth. Fully fifteen feet above the lake the awful eyes looked toward the land. And as the neck moved in unison with the swaying head the scales seemed to slide under and over one another a perfect armor for the neck.

"A plesiosaurian!" exclaimed Omega, leveling his glasses at the beast. "No—how can that be?" he added in bewilderment. "Those monsters were supposed to be extinct ages ago. And they had a smooth skin, while this thing has scales, like those of a brontosaurus, which was really a land animal. This must be a cross between the two that through the process of evolution has been developed. Anyway it is the last of the species and it has come here—to die."

"Like us it has followed the water and come here to die." said Thalma as she also leveled glasses.

For several minutes they watched the swaying head which every little while twisted from side to side, as the blazing eyes seemed to be searching for prey, while a whitish saliva dripped from the jaws. The body of the beast, which they knew to be enormous, was hidden beneath the water, but the agitation on the surface showed that powerful feet and legs were stirring.

"Yes, it has come here to die," repeated Omega, "to fight for the last drop of earth's water. It now has possession of the lake, and unless we kill it, it will kill us or drive us away."

Almost with the words Omega seized an atomic gun and pointed it at the brute's head. But before he could sight the weapon and pull the trigger the monster, as though sensing danger, suddenly jerked down its head and a moment later it had disappeared beneath the surface.

"It has gone!" cried Thalma. She was trembling as with a chill, and her eyes were wide with terror.

"It will appear again," said Omega, "and then we will kill it, for the water belongs to man. Doubtless that huge beast is all that remains of life on earth save ourselves. To-night while you sleep here in the ship, I will take a gun, take position behind a rock on the shore of the lake and watch for its appearance. I think shortly after nightfall when the rocks are cool it leaves the water and comes on land in a vain search for food, for beyond a doubt it has devoured everything in the lake, save marine mosses and the like. Yet as it has survived all contemporary life except man, it may live for centuries unless we destroy it."

"But there are not centuries of water out there," Thalma said.

"As to your hunting this monster alone, I will not hear of it. I shall go with you. Together we will destroy this menace of our new home."

ALL Omega's eloquence could not dissuade her. So, after the sun had set and the dry cold had chilled the hot rocks, they set out along the shore of the lake and looked eagerly out over the still water for a sight of their enemy. Nothing disturbed the silvery surface of the water. Crouching behind a mass of coral they waited, but throughout the long, still night they watched without reward, for nothing moved within their range of vision. The stars, wonderfully large and brilliant in that rarefied atmosphere, seemed to be the only link between them and the unknown. Only their own hurried breathing and the muffled thumps of their wildly beating hearts broke the silence. And as the sun rose again above the dead plains, weary and discouraged they returned to the ship.

While keeping up a bold front for Thalma's sake, Omega's heart was sad, for he well knew that unless they could vanquish that marine monster they were doomed. That such a dreadful creature had come to them from the mists of antiquity, as it were, was incredible. Yet he had seen

it, Thalma had seen it, and it resembled some of the sea monsters he had heard of in the past. They could not doubt its existence and must prepare for the worst.

Omega's name had been conferred on him by an ironical whim of fate. When he was born there were still many people on earth inhabiting the low valleys of the Pacific's floor where much water still remained. But the droughts had increased with the years, and before Omega had reached middle-life all rain had ceased to fall. The atmosphere became so rare, even near the ground, that it was difficult for the people with the aid of their machines to draw sufficient oxygen and nitrogen from it to prepare the food which had been man's principal sustenance for ages.

Gradually the weaker peoples had succumbed. But the remnants of the nations gathered about the receding waters, all foreseeing the end, but all determined to defer it as long as possible. There was no recourse. For ages before Omega was born the nations, knowing that the earth was drying up, had fought one another for the privilege of migrating to another planet to fight its inhabitants for its possession. The battle had been so bitterly contested that two-thirds of the combatants were slain. By the

aid of their space-cars the victors colonized other planets in our solar system leaving the vanquished on earth to shift for themselves. There was nothing for them to do but to fight on and await the end, for no space-car that man had ever devised was able to penetrate the cold, far-reaches of space. Only among the family of our own sun could he navigate his ships. And now, like the earth, every member of that once glorious family was dead or dying. For millions of years, Mars, his ruddy glow gone forever, had rolled through space, the tomb of a mighty civilization. The ashes of Venus were growing cold. Life on Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn already was in the throes of dissolution, and the cold, barren wastes of Uranus and Neptune always had forbidden man.

So it seemed that the name, Omega, had been fittingly bestowed. More than ever the stark truth made him shudder with apprehension, and he felt that only the coming of Alpha would give him strength to carry on.

"Now we must make ready for Alpha," said Omega, even while thoughts of the sea-monster chilled his heart. "We will make our servants prepare the way. Here in this valley must be born a new race of men. Life must come from death. Come, Thalma."

SHE smiled back at him, reassured by his confident manner, and together they entered a lower compartment of the ship. This compartment contained the servants of which Omega had spoken—divers machinery and other marvels of man's construction. Omega touched several buttons and a section of the ship's hull rolled aside. He pressed other buttons and whirled wheels. Then great sections of mirror slid out into the air and without apparent direction or control they ranged themselves far up on a steep hillside. Yet all were under perfect control. With invisible, atomic rays Omega made all do his bidding. For countless centuries man had mastered the atom, divided it, harnessed its electrons. Following the discoveries of the great French scientist, Becquerel, man had learned that the potential energy of all atoms—especially that of radium—is almost limitless. And as the disintegration of the atom carries an electrical discharge, man had learned to control this energy. Omega's machines, utilizing atoms from everywhere, even the ether, split them by radio-activity through electromagnetic waves, and utilized the energy of their electrons which always move in fixed orbits. There being forty radio-active substances, Omega took advantage of them all, and equalizing

the atomic weight of the atoms—whether those around a hydrogen nucleus or a helium nucleus—he broke the atoms down and directed the charges of their electrons. Then his motors amplified the discharges and, through the medium of an electric current, projected them in the form of invisible atomic rays which he could control and direct against any object and sustain and move at will by means of oscillating currents.

Soon upon the hillside, perfectly arranged and adjusted, appeared a giant, parabolic, refracting mirror with which he could obtain a view of any portion of the earth's surface by sending vibrating currents around the world and reproducing impressions already recorded on the ether, on the surface of the mirror. And beneath its center was a receiver, through which drew their energy both minutest sound around the world, had there been any to hear.

The small, atomic motors—which drew their energy both from hydrogen nuclei, the ether of space and the radio-active substances of all metals—now were placed on the hillside near the great mirror. These motors were capable of creating and focusing light, without bulb or other container, whenever and wherever needed. All were operated with

scarcely any effort by Omega.

In a measure it seemed strange that the Greek alphabet and all the classics of the ancients had survived antiquity. But the latest inventions of man explained it all. For man with his machines had reached far back into the shadowy past and proved the immortality of all thought and action. All the records of history, all the triumphs and defeats, the joys and sorrows and aspirations of humanity, came out of the past and marched across the screen of his historical recorder. As nothing is ever lost, all sounds and impressions occurring on earth since the dawn of its creation, being already impressed on the sensitive plastic and all-pervading ether, the same as a photograph is recorded on its film or plate, man had developed a machine for drawing on these impressions until at will the history of the world was before him. Even the varied life of the ancients came out of the past. Saints and sinners, slaves and masters mingled. Confucius sat before him in humility; Guatama counseled his followers to be humble; Christ died upon the cross. Warriors and statesmen shouted their triumphs and bewailed their defeats. Philosophers expounded their wisdom and Socrates drank the hemlock. Hannibal and Caesar and Alexander fought their battles, and

Napoleon marched gory and unafraid from Austerlitz to Waterloo. All came back at the call of Omega's science.

AS has been stated it was a giant craft on which Omega and Thalma had come to this last retreat of man. Within its interior were all the latest marvels of man's ingenuity and skill. These instruments of almost supernatural power not only reached back into the past but also penetrated the future. There was a great atomic-electric motor used in creating and controlling climate as long as there was any to control. Sending forth electro-magnetic waves it massed and directed the atmospheric pressure, sending heat waves here, cold ones there, thus causing droughts and rainfall at will. But now, as with the case of most of the other machines, Omega needed it no longer. He kept it because it linked him with the joy of the past. Besides, there was the mind-control appliance by whose aid man's mind might visit other worlds. This was done through the development of the subconscious and the discipline of the will. But Omega was weary of these pilgrimages, because his body could not perform those far-off flights. As time went on he realized that the earth was his natural home. Even the earth's neighbors, dead

and dying, offered him no haven.

Yes, Omega and Thalma had garnered the gist of the world's treasures before commencing this last trek. Gold and precious stones were common objects to them, because for countless ages man had made them at will, but around those they had brought clustered sacred memories of loved ones gone before. The biological machine in the chemical laboratory of the ship—the machine that brought forth life from nature's bountiful storehouse—was of little use now that both atmosphere and moisture were nearly gone. Yet Omega cherished this machine, and aside from its associations with the past, it held for him a fascination that he could not understand.

Having set the mirror and other mechanical servants in position, Omega and Thalma returned to the ship, and slept throughout the day, for with the descending sun they must again go forth to hunt that scaly demon which had taken possession of the earth's last water.

The night was moonless, but the bright starlight brought all objects into plain relief against the dark rocks. Taking position on the slope several rods above the beach, Omega and Thalma watched the lake eagerly, but nothing disturbed its mirror-like surface. As on the preceding

night the awful silence appalled them—even though they were accustomed to the vast solitude. It was so calm and still, so full of death and mystery, that it seemed they must cry out in the agony of their emotions. As the very silence was crushing their spirits so the knowledge that only one form of life on earth stood between them and the water to which their last hope clung, was maddening. How they longed to battle the hideous monster! But the hours dragged on with nothing to disturb the dead, heart-breaking silence. At last the Great Dipper had swung so far around that dawn appeared. Yet there had been not a ripple on the lake. Omega concluded that his guess was wrong—the beast did not leave the water at night to search for food. Perhaps it had learned the futility of such a search in a dead, dust-covered world.

WEARIED by their long and fruitless vigil they must have dozed, for suddenly Omega, who sat but a yard or two from Thalma, was aroused by a padded footfall and the exhalations of a noisome breath. Looking up he was horrified to see the monster towering above him, its head swaying gently to and fro, as its great, awkward feet sent it lunging forward and backward for many feet, its spotted, scale-cov-

ered body trailed over the rocks. By suddenly rounding the shoulder of the rock, sheltering Omega and Thalma, its head held high, it seemed not to have seen the two humans, for its terrible unblinking eyes were fixed ahead on the water. However, Omega, paralyzed with fear and astonishment, and being directly in the beast's path, believed that his hour had come. This was to be the end of all his plans—to be crushed by the enormous weight of the monster which challenged his right to live. But in that tense moment when he thought that it was all over, the lithe form of Thalma reached his side and in a frenzy of terror pulled him away. But even then the sloping belly of the onrushing beast tore him from her frail hands and dashed him against the rock.

While he lay there stunned and unable to move, Thalma discharged her weapon at the monster. Three times she fired in quick succession but the shots went wild, and in another moment the great brute struck the water with a resounding splash and disappeared from view. For a few minutes a trail of surface bubbles marked its rapid course toward the lake's center, then all was motionless and still as before.

"Are you hurt, Omega?" Thalma cried anxiously, kneeling by his side.

"Just shaken up a bit," he returned, sitting up with an effort. "Great hunters are we," he went on with a laugh. "We almost allowed the game to catch the hunters! Well, let's go back to the ship. We'll get him next time."

But their narrow escape had shaken their nerve. All day long they remained safely in the ship and kept their guns trained on the lake hoping that the beast would show himself. How or when it had left the lake they could not surmise, but that it was more formidable than they had thought now seemed certain, and Omega concluded to bring science to his aid. In this way he was sure that he would soon exterminate the monster.

So the next day he lay a cable carrying a high voltage all around the lake and connected it with traps of various designs both in the water and on the land. No more would they risk their lives hunting the beast in the open after nightfall.

The hot, still days that followed were anxious ones for these last children of life. Not a trap was sprung. The beast did not drag his slimy body and tail across the heavily charged cable. The last of his kind, fighting the last battle of existence, it seemed that nature had endowed him with uncanny cunning. There was the life-giving water for

whose possession no human kind challenged them, but this enemy was more terrible than any man, savage or civilized whom the earth had ever known.

DURING these anxious, watchful days Omega and Thalma went often to the mirror and gazed into it in search of vapor clouds. And more than once those gossamer-like formations appeared over different parts of the world to gladden their hearts only to fade away before their vision. The reflections of those embryo clouds became less frequent as the days wore on. Omega and Thalma knew that they had no right to hope for the return of water vapor. Their instruments, so finely attuned as to appear endowed with intelligence, the records of the past and their own common sense told them that. But nature and life in the upper reaches of the air were dying as hard as their own hope. They knew that the aerial manifestations they witnessed were but symptoms of the death struggle. And yet a real cloud, dark and pregnant with moisture, suddenly appeared in the mirror. Consulting the chart they saw that it was hovering over a great land of plain and mountains which formerly had been a part of the United States of America.

"We will go and examine this gift from heaven," said Omega.

"It moves over a once beautiful land, which the voices of history tell us, harbored a race of the free millions of years ago."

"Yes, we will go," agreed Thalma. "It may be after all that Alpha will first see the light far from this dreadful hollow and—and—that monster out there in the lake."

Omega hung his head. Well he knew that the presence of the monster was slowly killing his beloved. She complained not, but her dreams were disturbed with frightful visions, and often Omega awakened to find her at a window staring out over the lake with terror-stricken eyes.

This new cloud was thousands of miles to the east but with fond anticipations they entered the ship and plunged toward it. But although they reached the spot in one hour, the last remnant of vapor dissolved before their eyes, and they turned sadly homeward, once more beaten by the inexorable decrees of fate.

So having decided at last that this deep valley must remain their home forever, Omega looked about for a suitable building site, for although the ship was safe and comfortable they longed for a home on the earth. But the ever present menace of the sea-monster saddened them and filled them with misgivings, despite the fact that Omega could guard the cottage electrically. But

Omega wondered whether electric safeguards would keep this creature from coming some night to the cottage and sticking his loathsome head in at door or window. Omega shuddered at the thought, but refrained from mentioning such a possibility to Thalma.

Having selected a site under the branches of a great coral tree standing within the shade of an overhanging rock, Omega erected a cottage. It took him but a few days to build and furnish this building from supplies on the ship. It was complete in every feature, even to running water from the lake. Grass was brought from the lake and a lawn laid out about the cottage in the shadows of the rock. The grass was kept watered for Thalma's sake, even though the water was needed for other purposes and the lake was diminishing steadily. But she was sacred in his eyes—she the last mother the old earth ever was to know.

The interior of the cottage was embellished like a palace, for treasures were brought from the airship to grace its walls. The richest rugs, curtains, tapestries and silks the world had ever known were there for Thalma's pleasure and comfort. Paintings of green verdure, of forests and plains of waving grass, of tumbling mountain streams and cool, placid lakes, Omega drew

from the young days of the earth. The power to portray nature's moods and beauties had increased in many men with the passing of time. He placed these scenes before Thalma's couch that their cool and inspiring presence might comfort her while she awaited the coming of the child.

ONE morning being weary of the stark monotony of the valley, whose eastern wall was distant many miles, Omega and Thalma determined to scale the heights above. For sometimes in the sinister aspect of the chasm's walls, it seemed that the rocks would close together and crush out their lives. They concluded not to take the air-car, but to go on a rambling picnic with the ever present hope that they might discover another oasis of life.

Hand in hand they rose into the air, up and up for miles past frowning cliffs and dark caverns, yawning like grinning skulls above the outposts of death. There was no visible effort in their flight. They but took advantage of nature's laws which man had long understood. At last on the highest peak they paused to rest on a dust-covered rock.

The red sun rose above the cheerless horizon and blazed on them from a deep azure sky slashed across by bars of purple

and gold. More than nine miles beneath them spread the deep gorge, where nestled their little home, looking like a doll-house, and above it shone the great, silver ship. The lake shone like a speck of silver on the drab rocks. They gazed down upon it in an attitude of worship, for it alone in all that vast realm of peaks and plains and valleys symbolized life. Then suddenly a dark speck appeared on the surface of the lake. Omega looked at Thalma apprehensively, for well he knew the meaning of that speck. Her face was pale and drawn, and she clung to Omega as they pointed their glasses at the water.

The monster was again disporting himself. He threshed the water into foam with his long, sinuous body, while his head wagged and his terrible eyes looked toward the land. It was the first sight they had had of him since the night he almost killed Omega.

"Look!" breathed Thalma, "it is coming ashore. Oh, I did hope that it was dead!" And trembling violently she clung closer to her lord.

"Never mind, dear," consoled Omega as he watched the great beast waddle toward the shore. "We will get him this time," he went on exultingly. "Watch—he is going to get into the trap!"

But they were again doomed

to disappointment. Within a few rods of the shore, with its great, spotted body nearly all out of the water, the monster stopped, lifted its head and looked slowly around in every direction. Then apparently scenting danger, it turned, floundered back to the center of the lake and submerged.

"I—I—am afraid," shuddered Thalma.

"There is nothing to fear," reassured Omega. "The beast cannot get to our home, and one of these days he will either get caught in a trap or we will get a shot at him."

Although Omega spoke bravely he was really worried about the beast and the influence it was having on Thalma. He realized that he must at once devise a better method of extermination. Even though he did not fear it so much personally its presence was disturbing, and it was daily absorbing so much water needful for themselves.

THIS great gash in the earth's crust stretching for many miles below them had been the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean when its blue waves still lapped the shores of continents, and that little lake, far down in the earth's bosom, was the pitiful remainder of that once mighty sea. Far to the north-west, showing plainly against the sky in the focus of their binoculars, were

great ridges of mountain and table land, rising gaunt and desolate from the ancient bed of the sea—the site of the ancient empire of Japan. Round about them on every hand were the mute remains of marine life, for the spot where they sat had been far below the surface of the sea. Silent, mysterious, hopeless and dreary, the prospect appalled even their stout hearts. How they yearned for the sight of some living thing there upon those high peaks. Silence supreme and dreadful, in which even their voices, hushed and tremulous, sounded profane, cowed them by its unending solemnity and the relentless grip. Gray and nude save for their pall of dust the mountains rose into the sky, eternal in their ghostly majesty. And the dark valleys between with their gray lips of death looked like the gaping mouths of hell.

"Death! death! eternal and triumphant death, thou art everywhere!" cried Omega, springing up and gazing with hopeless eyes about over the desolation.

Thalma rose and touched his arm. A smile of faith and confidence shone on her face. He looked at her in wonder.

"Nay, death is not everywhere," she reproved gently. "Remember Alpha, our son. In him life does and will live again."

"Forgive me, Thalma," said Omega, taking her in his arms.

"You speak truly. With your loyalty and courage I know we will win."

And so as it had always been from the beginning of time, even so in these last days it took woman's love and devotion to sustain man.

Now Omega gazed around on the abode of death with an expression of disdain. He challenged it and dared it to do its worst. Life still triumphed, for he had Thalma and Alpha was coming soon. He would not surrender. He would fight the dark forces of death—even that horrible monster down there in the lake—and conquer them all. He would again 'gardenize' the world. The stubborn power of hope, that heritage from his atavistic ancestors, was surging through his blood.

"We will change all this," he went on, waving his hand toward the far rim of the sky. "We are still masters of life. But now let us descend," he added in answer to her approving smile.

So saying again hand in hand they stepped off into space and floated easily down toward their last home.

Omega knew that his first important task was to get rid of the beast. The fear-haunted expression in Thalma's eyes brooked no delay. Accordingly they went to the ship, and each taking a small sack they filled them with depth

bombs. Thus armed they floated out over the lake in quest of their enemy. But although quite shallow the water was opaque for the most part being discolored by vegetable matter stirred up by the monster, and the transparent portions were too deep for them to see bottom. Long and carefully they searched at a safe distance above the water, but no sight of the beast could be seen. Then hoping that a chance shot might reach and destroy him they passed to and fro over the lake's center and dropped their bombs. Great columns of water were sent high in air deluging them with spray. That was all. Still, they had no way of knowing whether a bomb had struck home. In spots the water was so violently agitated as to suggest that the monster writhed in a death struggle. But at last all became as quiet as before.

IT now occurred to Omega to surround the lake with an invisible wall of electricity of such power as to electrocute the beast should he attempt to go over or through it. This was accomplished by increasing the power of his motors and by automatic controls projecting a high voltage potential through the air around the lake. And then in addition to other protective appliances already installed Omega put a similar wall about the cot-

tage, much to Thalma's relief and delight.

One night they had retired early, Thalma being weary and her time but a few weeks away. To the sweet strain of music which had been in the air for ages, they soon fell asleep. How long he had slept Omega could never guess, but he was awakened suddenly. He sat up bewildered and stared into the darkness, because for some reason all lamps were out. And then he became aware of a peculiar sound coming from afar. It was a queer noise combining the roar of the surf upon a rock-bound coast, the sigh of the night wind through a forest and the rumble of thunder. Suddenly it seemed to him that earth and cottage were trembling, and the walls of the room swayed and buckled as though smitten by a great wind.

Frantically he rubbed his eyes, convinced that it was all a dream. But the noise drew nearer, thundered in his ears. In terror he got to his feet, tried to cry out. The words froze on his lips, for just then the wall before him crashed in as though struck by an avalanche. Then came a grinding, splitting jumble of sounds, the solid ground shook under the passage of some mighty force which increased for a moment followed by a piercing scream.

Frozen with horror Omega stared around the wrecked room

whose tottering walls seemed about to fall upon him. Where was Thalma? In a frenzy he stared into the darkness, felt over the couch. She was gone!

In some way he got outside and there in the direction of the lake he saw the monster, its great bulk looming high above the ground, its head swaying with the swing of its legs as it lumbered along. And, merciful God—held in the grip of the monster's jaws was Thalma!

The awful sight galvanized Omega to action. With a hoarse scream he launched himself at the beast, passed rapidly through the air above the monster and reached out for his wife. Scream after scream rent the still air as he pressed forward and the beast lurched on in its haste to reach the lake with its prey. But now Omega was close to his beloved, and he reached out to grasp her as once more he screamed right into the ears of his enemy. Then perhaps in sheer terror at the audacity of man, the great jaws of the monster relaxed and Thalma fell limp and unconscious to the ground.

As the beast lumbered on Omega knelt by her side.

"Thank God," he breathed, "she lives!"

Then he took her in his arms and turned back to the ruined home just as a great splash informed him that once more the

monster had entered his element to challenge them for its possession.

THALMA soon revived, but she clung to Omega and gazed about fearfully. How she had wandered out of doors and had been snapped up by the beast she could not tell, but Omega said that she must have been walking in her sleep. They went at once to the ship and there spent the remainder of the night.

Every light, including those about the Mirror, had been extinguished by the beast breaking the circuit. Yet it appeared that the later's passage through the electric wall had caused no harm. Omega explained that likely its bony scales had acted as an insulator against the action of the invisible wall.

While the cottage was being repaired they remained on the ship. But despite their recent harrowing experience, they went back to the cottage when the repairs were complete. It was more home-like than the ship, and Thalma had learned to love it, for it was to be the cradle of a new race. But before they again took up their residence there Omega had erected a high fence around the cottage yard. This fence was built of heavy cables securely fastened to huge posts, and each cable carried an electric charge of 75,000 volts. Omega was con-

fident that the beast could never break through. His confidence was shared by Thalma, but as an additional precaution she suggested that Omega place a similar fence about the lake. He did so, and when the last cable was in place they stood back and surveyed the work with satisfaction.

"We have him now," exulted Omega. "He can never leave the lake alive, much less reach the cottage. Despite his tough armor of scales this high potential will penetrate to his vitals."

"It is well," said Thalma as they turned away.

As they neared the cottage they knew that a crisis was at hand. Forgetting the dead world about them and subduing the fears that sometimes clutched their hearts, they lived in the joy of anticipation and made ready for the advent of a new soul.

Night came down moonless and dark save for the light of the stars. In the recesses of the rocks and in the bottoms of the valleys intense darkness held sway. But the grounds and the home of Omega and Thalma were ablaze with a thousand lamps, and on the near-by hillsides giant searchlights, which seemed to have no basis, which were born in the bosom of the air and blazed without visible cause, shot their rays into the sky for miles. Yet the powerful lights about the cottage were so tinted as to be

restful to the eye. Thus silent and with clock-like regularity the agents of Omega performed their functions. Man had mastered all the elements of life. All were his friends and servants, and none was his master save one—death.

In a perfect setting and exactly at the time set for the event Alpha came into the world, the child thrived from its first intake of earth's air.

Three weeks from birth Alpha partook of solid food in tablet form drawn chiefly from gaseous sources. At two months his speech was perfect, and at six months his education began. By glandular control Omega nurtured both his body and his mind and developed them rapidly. Small wonder that this child—the last to grace and bless the world—became his parent's only joy and hope. They guarded him from all dangers, instructed him in the great part he was to play in the world's future and set about to conserve that element on which all depended—the waters of the lake.

BUT during all these long, hot days and frigid nights, the close proximity of the monster cast a shadow over their souls, marred their happiness by day and terrorized their dreams by night. Often, when the sun beat down upon the lake, they saw his hideous head rise high above the

water and regard them with baleful eyes. Twice while at play Alpha had seen him and had run screaming to the protection of his mother, who had great difficulty in persuading him that there was no danger. This seemed to be true, for the monster made no attempt to force the fence. Endowed with more than the cunning of its remote progenitors, it seemed to realize that it was trapped. Many nights Omega and Thalma, armed with their ray guns and other implements of destruction, watched for the beast to attempt to come on land. Sometimes he would raise his head and look at them so long and steadily that icy chills ran along their spines and their hands shook so that they could not sight their weapons and therefore shot wild. Then the head would sink out of sight again.

Secure as they felt against his horrible presence it finally began to sap their courage. Besides, the lake fascinated Alpha, now but three years old but large and strong. He loved to wander by its shore and dabble in the water, but so long as the beast remained, an ever present danger was in this play. Besides there was the fear that he might escape the watchfulness of his parents and come in contact with one of the high tension cables.

And then Omega determined to

try another plan—he would electrically charge the water of the lake. He hoped that this would reach the monster in his watery lair and kill him instantly. So he constructed two giant magnets and placed one on each end of the lake. Then harnessing all the electrical energy at his command he sent a tremendous current through the water with high potential, alternating it at ten second intervals for an hour.

Two weeks later he watched for the carcass of the beast to rise. He felt now that his problem was to get rid of it so that it would not pollute the water, but it did not appear.

With fear and trembling Omega observed that the water of the lake was receding inch by inch. Then by chemical action on the coral beds and on the rocks, he created a dense cloud and caused it to form over the lake, thus in a measure protecting it from the sun's rays. But day by day, despite the sheltering cloud, the water receded. Day after day Omega moved his gauges hoping against hope that somehow and somewhere nature would again awaken and bring water upon the earth.

During all these days and months the monster did not raise its head above the surface of the lake—Omega was certain of this, for had the water been disturbed ever so little his water seismo-

graph, as well as his cameras, would have recorded it. The monster was dead at last and they were profoundly thankful. They were the undisputed masters of the earth's last water! Now Alpha could play about the shore and swim in the shallow water in peace and safety. So the dangerous fence was removed.

OMEGA knew that in the beginning the Creator had made man master of his own destiny. He had endowed him with reason and given the earth into his keeping. Omega thoroughly understood the Ruling Power of the universe. He read aright His commands, blazoned across the breasts of billions of worlds, and by the same token he knew that humanity on earth was doomed. Yet he was urged on by that unconquerable spirit which had made man king of all. He set up his rain-making machinery with the smile of a fatalist. For hundreds of miles its sinuous beams sprang into the sky, writhed about like great, hungry serpents with their tremendous sucking and receiving maws, then coiled back to earth bringing not a drop.

But one day the Mirror again showed small, faint clouds upon its surface. They were scattered over various parts of the world and their presence made Omega wonder. There appeared to be no reason for them.

"I do not understand those clouds," he said to Thalma as he sat with her and Alpha in the shade of the coral tree. "Perhaps there are hidden places of moisture, that have escaped the receiving rays of this mirror."

"Let us go and see," exclaimed Thalma, her eyes agleam with a new hope. "Let us make another voyage around the world. Alpha has never been far from home."

"That is so," he agreed. "We will go at once."

So they entered the silver ship and sailed away over the hot, dry wastes, on and on over the cities of antiquity. The ruins of New York, London, Paris and other marts of the ancients were visited in their melancholy quest for life. But even the sites of these cities were hard to find. Only the tops of the tallest structures, such as the tip of the Washington monument and the towers of office buildings stood above the ashes and sands of centuries. But not even the shadow of a cloud was seen. Still they sailed on—even skirted the dark wastes of the poles and stopped in deep valleys to test for water. Twice around the equatorial regions they voyaged in search of a new and better haven, but in vain. The insistent cry for water burned in their souls and led them back to the little lake—the last sop nature had to offer the remnant of her children.

ALTHOUGH the days were still hot and blistering, the nights were cold, ice often forming on the lake near the shore and lingering until touched by the advancing sun. Omega understood, and again a cold fear clutched his heart. Unless by some miracle of the heavens sufficient moisture should come back to the earth, no human soul could long endure the heat of the day and the freezing temperature of night.

To still further conserve the precious water of the lake, Omega now extended the folds of the cloud curtain down to its shores thus completely enclosing it. And as this further reduced the evaporation to a remarkable extent the hopes of Omega and Thalma took on new life. Here they visioned Alpha and his children living and dying in peace, now that the monster was no more. With the help of additional safeguards Omega reckoned that the water might be made to last many more years, and, before it could become wholly exhausted, some whim of nature might again shower the earth with rain.

Now to pass the time—for there was nothing to do except to direct the appliances about them—this last trio of mortals loved to leave the shelter of the cottage, now that they had nothing further to fear from the sea monster, when the westering sun

was low, and ramble among the shadows of the cliffs and commune with the past, until the chill of night drove them indoors. Sometimes sitting there in the dusk Thalma and Alpha would listen to Omega's rich voice as he recounted an epic story in the life of long ago. So to-day seated together on a cliff above the airship, they watched the sun descend. Thalma and Alpha had asked for a story, but Omega refused. For some time he had sat silent, his great, brilliant eyes on the flaming sun as it sank toward the rim of the earth. A great loneliness had suddenly seized him. He recognized it as a presentiment of disaster. It was beyond the analysis of reason, but for the first time in his life he longed to hold back that sun. Somehow he feared the advent of the night. It seemed to him that before the morning light would again flood the earth a dire calamity would befall them.

"Why so sad?" asked Thalma fearfully, and Alpha, at his father's knees, looked up in wonder.

"It is nothing," replied Omega with forced composure as he caressed the boy. "Some foolish thoughts of mine. Now as it is getting chilly I think we had better go down. Oh, how I dread this awful cold which is creeping steadily and mercilessly over the world!" he added softly, his eyes lingering on the sun.

With her usual sweet smile Thalma agreed. So they rose and floated down. When they reached the floor of the valley they paused and regarded the cloud that screened the lake.

"It does well," remarked Omega. "It will make the water last into the years."

"Yes, and all for our boy," said Thalma proudly. Alpha had left them and was playing along the shore.

"It is now time that a mate for him be on the way," went on Omega wistfully. "He must have a sister, you know."

"It is true," she agreed with a glad smile.

Omega had spoken truly. Without a mate Alpha could not perpetuate the race. And so it was arranged that before the rising of the morrow's sun a new life should begin.

Science had steadily advanced the span of life. When Alpha was born Omega was two hundred years old, but that was only middle age. Thalma was twenty-five years his junior. The human birth-rate had decreased with the passing of the centuries and nature now demanded the most exacting conditions for the propagation of the human species. Thalma at her age could not afford to wait longer. Alpha's mate must be provided forthwith.

"Alpha wants to play a while before going in," Thalma con-

tinued presently. "I will remain with him."

"Very well, dear," said Omega. "I will go on and prepare dinner."

So saying he set his face toward the cottage, but before he had taken a dozen steps he was startled by a piercing scream from Thalma. He turned swiftly, then stood paralyzed with terror and amazement. Out of the cloud curtain surrounding the lake protruded the ugly scale-covered head and neck of the monster he had believed dead! And the horrible, swaying head was darting down toward the playing boy! The monster's jaws were spread wide, its black tongue was leaping out and in like lightning, the sickening saliva was dripping upon the sand, and its awful eyes were blazing like coals. And then in a twinkling the huge jaws seized the child, the head reared back, the jaws closed, stifling the lad's screams, and it started to draw back into the cloud.

BUT, after the first onrush of horror, life came again to Omega's numbed senses. He darted forward with a mad cry, and as he swung through the air rather than ran, he seized a stone and hurled it at the brute's head. His aim was true and the stone struck the great brute on the bony hood above the right eye. It did not harm, but it maddened

the monster. Hissing horribly it swung Alpha high in the air and with a fling dashed him down upon the rocks. Then with a hoarse bellow it turned upon Omega. With its first forward lunge it seemed about to crush Thalma, who was between it and its intended victim. But the sight of her mangled child and the danger to her lord roused all the latent fury and courage in her soul and made of her a fighting demon. Like Omega she grabbed the first weapon at hand—a stone the size of a man's fist—and with the hot breath of the monster in her face she hurled the stone with all her strength straight into the red, gaping mouth.

With a blood-curdling scream the brute halted, reared backward, then ran its head back and forth over the rocks. Its loathsome body thrashed about in the lake, throwing water far up on the beach. Then in its contortions it wallowed up out of the lake as it swung its terrible head about in agony, all the while hissing its challenge.

Terror-stricken, unable to move, Omega and Thalma watched it and could not understand its writhings. But as it continued to writhe and groan they understood at last—the stone had lodged firmly in its throat and was choking it to death.

Then they sprang to Alpha's side. Omega gathered him up in his arms, but he saw with one agonized glance that he was dead. His skull was crushed and it appeared that every bone in his body was broken.

Omega's heart was bursting, but he did not cry out. Holding the crushed body of his son, he raised his eyes to that God who throughout the ages had hidden His face from man, and smiled a brave smile of humility and resignation. While Thalma, understanding all, looked on dumb and dry-eyed.

Leaving the monster floundering about in its death agony, they took their beloved son to the cottage and there injected those chemicals which would forever arrest decay. Then they placed him on his cot that he might be with them to the end of life. It was then that Thalma, broken in spirit, found refuge and relief in tears which have always been woman's solace and savior.

And Omega, gazing out toward the lake, saw that the monster lay still. They had won their long battle, but at an awful cost. Omega realized that the gigantic creature, probably deep in a water cavern, had been only stunned by the electric charges.

THELMMA refused to be comforted. Day after day she wept above the lifeless form of

her boy. All Omega's words of consolation, all his reasoning and faith in the wisdom and justice of all things, failed to sooth her torn heart. Nor did the promise of another child, rouse her from her sorrow. She steadfastly refused to consider another child. Life had lost its last hold on her soul, and now she was ready to surrender to that cruel fate which had given them mirages of promise and mocked their misery. In vain Omega explained that it was their duty to fight on; that they, the last of a once noble race, must not show the white feather of cowardice. He mentioned the great consolation they had of having their beloved son ever near them, though lifeless. But Thalma longed for the presence of the soul, for those words of endearment and love that had thrilled her mother heart.

Before the embalment it would have been possible for Omega to restore life to his boy. Man had mastered all the secrets of biology and life. He could have mended the broken bones and tissues, revitalized the heart and lungs and cleared the brain. Alpha would have walked with them again. But his personality would not have been there. That mysterious something, men call the soul, had fled forever, and so far mankind had not been able to create its counterpart. To have brought life again to Alpha

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would have been a travesty on the brilliant mind they had known. Omega recalled many pathetic examples of such resuscitation where the living had walked in death.

Omega foresaw the end, but he smiled in the face of it all. He was the same kind and loving companion Thalma had always known, her every want his command and law. But no more she realized its inspiration and love. He seldom left her side any more, but sometimes overcome with sorrow he would soar up above the peaks and commune alone with the past.

So to-day he had risen higher than usual. The red sun beat upon his body as he hovered in the hot air, his eyes fixed on the distant sky line. He gazed like a famished animal, for it seemed to him that at last a cloud must appear above that hopeless shore of land and sky and bring renewed life to him and his. Yet he fully realized the impossibility of such a thing. Slowly his great, dark eyes roved around the horizon. He loathed its dreary monotony, and still it fascinated him. Beyond that dead line of land and sky lay nothing but ghastly death. His many voyages in the airship and the reflecting Mirror told him that, but still he hoped on.

When at last he glided down to the cottage the sun was low.

Having registered the time in his mind when he left Thalma—for countless generations man had dispensed with time-keeping devices—he realized that he had been gone just three hours. Reproaching himself for his negligence he entered the doorway, then stared aghast.

Upon Thalma's wide couch facing a painting of the ancient, green world, she had placed the body of Alpha, then lain down by his side. Her glazed eyes were fixed upon the picture, and for the first time in many weeks there was a smile about her lips.

Omega knelt by her side, took her cold hands in his and feverishly kissed her brow. With a grief too deep for tears he smiled at death, thankful for the love she had borne him. Nor did he censure the Plan of the Creator, the Plan that had led him, Omega, scion of the world's great, up to the zenith of life and now left him alone, the sole representative of its power. Thalma had passed on, and in the first crushing moments of his agony Omega was tempted to join her. Without effort and without fear or pain, his was the power to check the machinery of life.

CRUSHED and broken, Omega sat by his dead, while the shadows of night entered the valley and wrapped all in their soft embrace. When would his own

hour strike? He might retard or hasten that time, but the real answer lay in that little lake out there under the stars, daily shrinking despite the cloud curtain. There was nothing more to live for, yet he determined to live, to go down fighting like a valiant knight of old, to set an example for the sons of other worlds.

But despite his brave resolution his grief for a while seemed likely to master him. Heart-broken he finally went out into the cold dusk and gazed up at the heavens appealingly.

"Alone!" he whispered as an overwhelming sense of his isolation tore his spirit. "Alone in a dead world—the sole survivor of its vanished life!"

He slumped to the ground and buried his face in the cold dust. His thoughts were jumbled in a maze of pain and sorrow. He could neither pray nor think. Gasping, dying a thousand deaths, he lay there groveling in the dust. But at last he rose, dashed the dust from his eyes and again faced the sky. He would accept the cruel mandate of nature. He would live on and try to conquer all—even death.

He cast his eyes along the shore of the lake, and there in the starlight loomed the form of the dead monster which, but for Thalma's unerring aim, would have been the last of earth's

creatures. Omega sighed and turned back to his dead.

But despite his resolution to live the loneliness was sapping Omega's spirit. During the following weeks in a mood of recklessness and despair he allowed the cloud curtain to dissolve above the lake. Once more the sun's hot rays poured down unhindered and the lake receded rapidly.

As time went on Omega grew more restless. Only by taking many voyages around the world was he able to endure the appalling silence. He was the last traveler to visit the ancient marts of man, he was the last hope and despair of life. Sometimes he talked aloud to himself, but his words sounded hollow and ghostly in that deep silence, which only added to his misery.

And then one day in a fit of desperation he rebelled. He cursed the fate that had selected him to drink the last bitter dregs of life. In this desperate frame of mind he evolved a daring plan. He would not drink those dregs alone!

IN the chemical laboratory of the ship were all the elements of creative force and life known to man. From the four corners of the earth they had been garnered, and some had come from sister planets. Here were the ingredients of creation. For thou-

sands of years man had been able to create various forms of life. He had evolved many pulsing, squirming things. He had even made man-like apes possessing the instinct of obedience, and which he used for servants, and much of his animal food also had been created in this manner.

Being skilled in all branches of biology and chemistry Omega would create a comrade to share his long wait for death. So he set to work and the task eased the pain in his heart. He place his chemicals in the test tube and watched the cell evolve until it pulsed with life. Carefully nursing the frail embryo he added other plasms, then fertilized the whole with warm spermatozoa and placed it in the incubator over which glowed a violet, radio-active light.

The young life developed quickly and soon began to take form within the glass walls. In a month it half-filled the incubator, and at the end of six weeks he released it, but it still grew amazingly.

At first Omega was appalled by the monstrosity he had created, for it was a loathsome, repulsive creature. Its head was flat and broad and sat upon its sloping shoulders without a connecting neck. Its legs were short, but its arms were long, and when standing erect it carried them well in front of an enormous

torso. Its short hands and feet were webbed like those of a duck. It had no visible ears, and its nostrils were mere holes above a wide, grinning, thin-lipped mouth, which was always spread in a grin. Its large, round, red eyes had no gleam of intelligence, and its hairless skin, covered with minute, sucker-like scales, lay in loose, ugly folds across its great chest. Most of its movements were slow and uncertain, and it hopped about over the floor like a giant toad, uttering guttural sounds deep within its chest. Omega had set out to create an ape-man, but this thing was neither man nor beast, bird or reptile, but a travesty on all—an unspeakable horror from the dead womb of the past.

Yet hideous as this creature was Omega looked upon it with a certain degree of gratitude. It was a companion at least, and it seemed to reciprocate the respect of its creator by fawning upon him and licking his hand. Its red tongue always hung from its slavering mouth like that of a panting dog. Omega named it The Grinner, because of its habitual and ghastly smile. He took it to the cottage that it might wait on him through the long hours of solitude. That night it slept by his side, content and motionless. But the next morning after this first night of incongruous companionship Omega

was awakened by its stertorous breathing and the touch of a cold, clammy sweat which was oozing from its pores and dropping upon the floor.

Throughout the day Omega marveled at this phenomenon. He noticed that the weird thing went often to the drinking fountain and wrapped its tongue about the water jet. That night he awakened at midnight to find The Grinner gone. He did not bother to look for him and mid-forenoon he returned. His rotund form seemed to have grown even larger, and as he ambled about on all fours the sweat trickled from his repulsive skin and trailed across the floor. It was a strange thing and Omega was at a loss to account for it, but his wonder was eclipsed by his appreciation of The Grinner's companionship. The Grinner was often absent for hours at a time, but he always returned of his own free will. Omega often saw him ambling among the rocks or stretched out in the sun on the beach. He formed the habit of letting him have his way, which was that of extreme laziness. But during all this time he was growing prodigiously. In three months he had become a monster weighing well over half a ton, but he still retained his amiable nature and affection for his master.

OMEGA seldom left the cottage. Determined to live as long as possible—for the age-old urge of life still persisted—to do nothing to hasten his end, he, nevertheless, was doing nothing to defer it. His soul in the past, he desired only to be near his dear ones. For hours he would sit gazing on their peaceful features, pouring into their heedless ears the love songs of his heart. Living for them, patiently awaiting the day when he, too, could enter into rest, he paid less and less attention to The Grinner, only noticing that he grew more horrible and repulsive as his size increased.

Lonely and despondent Omega at last left the cottage only to go to the airship for supplies. He seldom even looked toward the lake. It was a long time since he had walked about its shores, but one afternoon the impulse came to wander that way again. He was amazed that the water was disappearing so rapidly. The body of the monster now lay more than fifteen rods from the water's edge, though it had been killed on the edge of the lake.

With an indifferent and melancholy gaze Omega looked across the lake. Suddenly his stare became fixed and wild, like that of one stricken dumb. About twenty rods out the water was suddenly agitated as though by the movement of some great bulk along

its bottom, and then for a fleeting instant he glimpsed a dark, shining form heave above the surface, then sink out of sight before he could grasp its details.

"My God," he exclaimed hoarsely, "there is another sea monster! Likely it is the mate of the one Thalma killed. I might have known there would be a mate. We were dealing with two of the beasts all that time. And now this thing disputes my right to the water!"

Omega's face grew grim and stern as he glared out over the water and his heart-beats quickened. The latent combativeness of humanity was once more aroused in him. He had considered himself the last representative of life on earth. He should remain the last. No beast should claim that honor. He would kill it.

Then for two weeks he waited and watched for it to reappear, waited with all the terrible atomic weapons at hand, but he saw it no more. The Grinner sleeping in the sand was the only form of life to be seen, and at last he became weary of the hunt. He figured that some day he would charge the lake, but there was no hurry.

At last Omega lost all interest in the things about him. The Grinner came and went un hindered and almost unnoticed. He continued to grow, but Omega gave him little thought. Even the

treasures in the airship had lost their lure for him. Disconsolate and hopeless, yet clinging grimly to life, he passed his time in the company of his dead.

He had not left the cottage for several weeks, when one cold morning after a sleepless night, something impelled him to go in search of The Grinner who had been absent all night. As this had become a frequent occurrence during the past two months Omega's curiosity was aroused. As he glided toward the lake he wondered why his interest in his surroundings had been aroused by thoughts of The Grinner, and once more he thought of killing that other sea-monster in the lake. The lake! He stopped and stared and stared. The lake was gone! Only a pool of an acre or two remained, and in its center, disporting himself in glee was—not the monster he was looking for—but The Grinner! The bloated creature was rolling about in the water with all the abandonment of a mud-wallowing hog.

OMEGA gazed in astonishment, then a shrill laugh escaped him. He had mistaken The Grinner for another monster of the deep. It was the last joke of life, and it was on him.

Then he realized that this grotesque child of his hands, having in its system the combined thirst of the dry ages—man, animal,

plant, bird and reptile—was sucking up the lake, absorbing it through his pores, then sweating it out only to repeat the process. Water was his element and food. From the dim, dry past had come nature's cry for water to find expression in this monster of Omega's making. That which he had created for a companion had grown into a terrible menace, which was rapidly exhausting his remaining stronghold of life. But, somehow, Omega did not care, and as he watched the monstrous thing finally flounder its way to the shore and lie down panting in the sun, he was glad that it was not another monster of the deep.

For a moment Omega's eyes rested on the drying form of the dead beast on the slope above him, then with a shudder he turned to The Grinner.

He went up close and stared into its terrible eyes which blinked back at him as its mouth spread in a leer. Already the sweat was coursing along the slimy folds of its skin and dripping off to be swallowed by the thirsty ground. It was a huge water sucker. It took water in enormous quantities, fed upon its organisms, then discharged it through its skin. Assisted by the rays of the sun it was rapidly drying up the lake.

Now, as Omega stood regarding it in awe and wonder, it

showed signs of distress. It began to writhe and utter hoarse cries of pain. Its eyes rolled horribly, its great, barrel-like body heaved and trembled, and it waved its long arms and threshed its feet upon the ground. Omega realized that it was the victim of its own abnormal appetite. With the relish of a gormandizer it had taken more of its peculiar food than even its prodigious maw could assimilate. Soon its struggles became fiercer. It rolled over and over in contortions of agony, the sweat streaming from its body, while a pitiful moaning came from its horrid mouth. But at last it became quiet, its moanings trailed off into silence; it jerked spasmodically and lay still.

Omega approached and placed his hand over its heart. There was no pulsation. The Grinner was dead.

With a sigh Omega turned back to the cottage. Although he was now alone once more, he did not care. All he had to do was to prepare himself for the Great Adventure, which despite all man's god-like achievements, still remained a mystery.

Now that the lake was almost gone it again drew his attention. The sickly grass had long since given up trying to follow the retreating water and now was only a dead and melancholy strip of yellow far back from the shore.

Every day Omega went to the little pool and calmly watched it fade away, watched without qualms of fear or heartache. He was ready. But even now, hot and weary, he refused adequately to slake his thirst. He must fight on to the last, for such was the prerogative and duty of the human race. He must conserve that precious fluid.

AT last there came a morning when Omega, gazing from his doorway, looked in vain for the shining pool. Nothing but a brown expanse of rock and sand met his view where the lake had been. Already the salt crystals were glinting in the sun. A long, lingering sigh escaped him. It had come at last! The last water of those mighty seas which once had covered nearly the whole earth, had departed leaving him alone with the dead of ages.

Hot and feverish he glided over the dry bed of the lake. Finally in the lowest depression on earth he found, in a little hollow of rock, a mere cupful of water. Like a thirst-maddened animal he sucked it up in great gulps, then licked the rock dry. IT WAS THE LAST DROP!

Omega rose, his face calm and resigned. With a smile of gratitude he looked up at the sky. The water was bitter, but he was thankful he had been given the final cup.

Then he went to the airship and shot up into the blue and on around the world in a voyage of farewell. In a few hours he was back. Reverently he set the airship down on its landing place. He was through with it now. Its usefulness was gone, its great, pulsing motors forever silent, soon to be covered with the dust of ages, he would leave it a monument to mankind. For a little while he wandered among the treasures of the ship. Sacred as they were they still mocked him with their impotency to stay the hand of death. But he loved them all. Thalma had loved them and they had been Alpha's playmates, and their marvelous powers had been his hope and inspiration. With loving caresses and a full heart he bade good bye to these treasures of his fathers, soon to become the keepsakes of death.

At last having completed the rounds he let himself out into the still air. Resolutely he set his face toward home.

The hot noonday sun, beating fiercely down on the dead world, entered the cottage and fell in a flood of glory about the couch where Omega, the last man, lay between his loved ones. His great eyes were set and staring, but on his features rested a smile of peace—the seal of life's last dream.

"The rest is silence."

THE END

Euthanasia *Limited*

By David H. Keller, M.D.

THE detective in science fiction is a theme big enough to warrant a complete full-length article in itself. Sherlock Holmes popularized the notion of solving crimes by scientific means and other writers theorized that with the advanced technology available to the criminal, crimes of the future might require that detectives be outstanding scientists in their own right.

Arthur B. Reeve hit the jackpot in 1910 when he introduced in COSMOPOLITAN a series of stories featuring Craig Kennedy, "The Scientific Detective." Laboratory techniques were behind Kennedy's solution of most crimes and frequently the crimes involved advanced use of science turning the stories into science fiction.

This approach to the detective story so enthralled the reader that Craig Kennedy's adventures

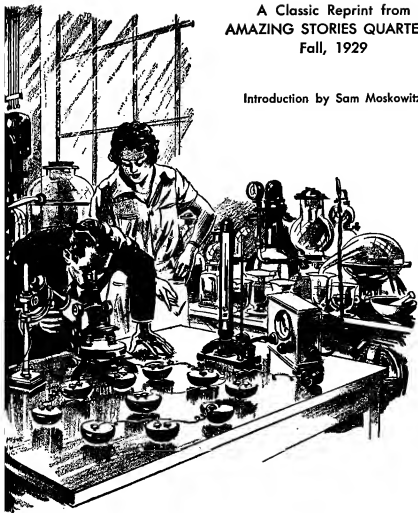


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AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY
Fall, 1929

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz



were even published in sets which sold at best-seller tempo. Other writers were quick to recognize that Reeve had tapped a rich vein of interest and Michael

White in 1911 and 1912 wrote a series of stories for TOP NOTCH MAGAZINE built around the ingenious scientific detection of Proteus Raymond. All these stor-

ies were bonafide science fiction, even involving atomic energy, as such titles as Eyternium X and Force Mercurial manifest.

In 1929, some time after this style had become popular, David H. Keller, M. D. produced one of the most remarkable detectives in or out of science fiction and performed a feat of characterization so extraordinary that it should be studied by every student of writing technique. "Taine of San Francisco" first made his appearance in four related short stories published as a group in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY for Summer, 1928 as The Menace. No scientific detective was ever more popular in science fiction magazines than Taine, which sounds unbelievable when one is told that Taine was a "wizened, middle-aged, small man," undistinguished by any special physical or obvious mental attribute, who was so ordinary that it was difficult to remember him minutes after a meeting. Keller brought this unprepossessing character to life by concentrating upon his background and eccentricities. Taine,

most brilliant operative of the secret service was severely henpecked by his wife and two daughters and he bribed his wife with 10% of his earnings to permit him to venture out on his strange assignments. He carried a little puppy around in his pocket which he traded in for a new one whenever it grew too big. His dialogue was one step above an idiot's in its calculated drollness and Taine, a small man dependent upon his wits for survival was quite candid in his fear of getting hurt or killed. Whenever offered a cigarette he always refused with the remark that has become classic: "No thank you, I used to smoke, but I found that the tobacco was bad for the delicate enamel of my teeth, and once that is destroyed, it is never replaced." Close followers of Taine eventually learned that he had a complete upper and lower plate!

This is the detective you will be introduced to in Euthanasia Limited and his acquaintance is an important chapter in the history of the detective in science fiction.

A LITTLE white-haired woman was working in her laboratory.

In spite of the fact that the room was filled to overflowing with a multitude of electro-scientific instruments, there was or-

der and method in their arrangement and the entire atmosphere was one of exquisite cleanliness. Anna Van Why was, without doubt, an ultra-modern scientist, but there were certain inherited characteristics in her nature

which it was impossible for her to escape from. Thus she combined the modern with the past. While she smoked, the ashes and the odor were instantly removed from the room by a vacuum ash receiver, a little invention of her own.

She had arranged the halves of apples in series, thus forming a vegetable battery which produced a potential of over one volt. She smiled to herself as she realized that she was the first human being who had ever approached the problem of life in that way. Before that morning millions of persons realized in a dim way that vegetation had life. She alone thought of the possibility of connecting that life with death.

Even as she was carefully measuring and recording the amount of electric potential formed by these segmented applies, her half brother came into the room. Between the two was a peculiar bond that was both negative and positive in its potentiality. They admired each other in some ways, detested each other in some way, but always there was the strong tie of mutual scientific interest in all of the unanswered questions that Nature has put to a puzzled man.

"The apple is alive, John," she said, as he looked up and saw who her visitor was. "I arrange them in certain sequence, con-

nect them with fine copper wire and obtain over a volt of electrical potential. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Nothing new. We have all known for years that electric potential was a common property of nearly all living matter. Some fishes are veritable batteries, capable of discharging such an amount of electricity that men are disabled and often die in the water before they recover the use of the muscles. Plants have potential electricity; animals have. Did you ever rub a cat's hair in the dark? I never thought of an apple, but there is nothing new in it now that I do think of it. It is simply saying an old sentence with new inflection. Nothing to be excited about, is it?"

The white-haired woman smiled.

"There are two reasons why you are not interested in my apple battery, and both are very interesting. In the first place you see nothing commercial in it. You cannot visualize some new kind of stock promotion to fool your gullible public. The second reason is that it is a part of my search for the real cause and meaning of death. You are too active, too much alive, to be interested in death. It means nothing to you. You only think of it to avoid thinking of it. Am I right?"

The well-dressed man laughed.

"Absolutely, Sister Anna. Life is too sweet for me to spend it thinking about the problems of death, and a man has to have money in order to spend it and he has to spend it in order to have any comfort out of life. So your apple battery does not interest me. Go on with your vegetable investigation. I brought a copy of *Vogue* with me, and while you work with apples I will read about the peaches of society and later on we will go to dinner and I will spend on you some of the money I make out of that gullible public you would so like to protect from my ravages."

HE HAD hardly started to read when another visitor came. He was a noted scientist from Edinburgh, and had come across the Atlantic for no other purpose than to see the celebrated electrobiologist, A. Van Why. He was more than surprised to find that she was a woman, for in her publications she had carefully concealed not only all personalities but even her own sex. So they both were surprised—she to think that anyone would be enough interested in her work to make such a journey to see her, and he to find that the scientist he so admired in literature was a little bit of a white-haired woman.

"If you can spare the time,"

he said, after the formalities of the introduction had been finished, "I wish that you would tell me about your investigations into the real nature of death. I have heard that you are almost alone in some of your ideas and that, if they are shown to be true, you will revolutionize our entire biological thought. Suppose you start with the idea that I am just a rather ordinary scientist—in other words, give me a rudimentary lecture on the subject."

"You underestimate your own importance as a scientist, Sir Lauder," Anna Van Why replied. "No one knows better than I do your remarkable contributions of electrical biology. If I do as you wish me to, it will be more with the idea of politely complying with a request, than to acknowledge any inferiority on your part. However, make yourself comfortable and I will see how elemental I can make the lecture.

"A second after death occurs there is practically no difference in the body. The dead body is practically similar to the living body, just as the charged battery is similar in structure to the discharged battery. Only something has happened which makes us say that the person is dead. For over thirty years I studied this problem of death to see just what phenomena happened that could

be held accountable for the change called death. All the peculiar phenomena I found were the result of death, rather than the actual cause of the cessation of life. All my studies in the circulation, respiration, blood chemistry, acid-alkali balance, failed absolutely to reveal the actual cause of death.

"Finally I approached the question from the standpoint of conductivity. I found that, as death approached, the central nervous system decreased while the liver increased in conductivity, and there were, at the same time, the changes one would expect in the electrical capacity of the bodily cells. But even here I felt that we were simply observing a fact instead of actually finding a real cause of the cessation of life.

"But I could not give up the idea that in some way electricity was connected with all the changes comprehended under the two words, life and death. There was no value in the study of the varied associates of death, such as hemorrhage, injury, infection, insomnia, anaesthesia, asphyxia, surgical shock, the removal of vital organs. There must be some single factor back of and accompanying these myriads of complicating accessories. I knew what happened in all of them—the living structures, the individual cells, were unable to

hold together and began to disintegrate—I knew this happened. What I wanted to know was why it happened.

ONE of the primary rules of biology that I accepted many years ago was that all life was governed by the same rules. In applying this rule to our problem I would simply state that in all living things the reason for life and the cause of death are the same for all. If an apple lives, it lives for the same reason that a man lives. The causes that kill man, also kill apples.

"With that rule in mind I again approached the problem of death. I now was able to have an unlimited supply of experimental material, without any opposition from the anti-vivisectionists. They did not care how many apples I used. So I worked with a great many different objects, all of which I thought could be called alive, in the same sense that man was alive. When I did this I satisfied myself that all life, plants, animals, fruits, have a certain electrical potential that can be measured during life, and which drops to zero at death. All that the supposed causes of death did was to decrease the potential. Irrespective of the name—anaesthetics, insomnia, poisons, injuries, freezing, boiling, or a hundred other forms of fatal complications—

all that happened in every instance was this change in the potential. There was just one important fact to be considered and that was the difference in the potential of the nervous system compared to the other systems of the body.

"Our work with insomnia was interesting. Perhaps you know the old system of torture used by Chinese. The prisoner's head is shaved and he is seated on a chair and held there so he cannot move. Above is a pail of water and from that pail a drop falls every minute on his hairless scalp. In a few days he dies. Hour after hour he has remained awake waiting for that drop to fall every minute. In our experiments we have found that insomnia reduces the potential of the nervous system to zero, at which point death occurs. If, however, just before zero is reached, the organism is permitted to rest and sleep, the potential climbs up from zero and the life of the individual is saved.

THE two forms of life that we did the most experimenting with were the apple and the amoeba. First let me tell you about the apple. We feel that it is alive. It was not only alive, but it breathed, consuming 3 to 4 cubic centimeters of oxygen every hour. Thus we had a second method of studying the life

phenomena of the apple, one being the determination of its electric potential and the other its ability to consume oxygen. We had previously performed experiments on the rabbit and dog with adrenalin and temperature changes. We repeated these experiments on the apple and obtained identical results. For example we could anaesthetize the apple, producing first a rise in the potential and an increased metabolism and then a continual fall to a zero point, where we had no potential and an absolute cessation in respiration. When the potential reached zero, the apple rapidly began to disintegrate—in other words, to rot.

"We invented a little apparatus to measure the potential of the apple. In perfect health this was about fifty millivolts. The idea of fruits inspired me to see if I could make a battery and this combination of half apples and wire on my table is the result. From it I obtained a potential of over one volt.

"With these facts in my possession I told my students that we were prepared to continue the same experiments with a form of life that we felt was really ancestral, the one-celled amoeba. One of my girls, a tireless worker with the microscope, finally perfected an electrode so fine that it could actually be inserted into the living amoeba as it lay under

the microscope. We were now able to do three things. One was to measure the potential as we had the apple and all other forms of life, the second was the ability to withdraw the electric force from the amoeba and the third the ability to charge the amoeba with electricity. In other words, we were able to measure, decrease and increase the potential and all under the keen eye of the observer at the microscope. We performed most of these experiments with the *Amoeba Pelomyxa*, a large type that often attains a diameter of one-sixteenth of an inch.

ITS potential often reached fifteen millivolts. This potential changed when adrenalin, anaesthetics and sodium iodide were added to the liquid in which the amoeba was suspended. We could measure the change in potential under these various conditions by means of the little electrode which we placed inside the body of the one-celled animal. When we increased the potential by electrical means was decreased, the movements became less active and the body came together in a quiet mass. When zero was reached, the amoeba disintegrated, first into large and then into smaller granules and finally became actually dissolved in the surrounding liquid. That, we felt, meant real death.

WHAT did it mean? Simply this. We were able to produce every phenomenon of death simply by reducing the potential to zero. All the other factors, which we have been considering as the causes of death, simply do the same thing, namely, reduce the potential to zero. Therefore we feel that we have at last reached the point where we can say that death is caused by the reduction of the potential to zero.

"But, if at any time before zero is reached, we reverse the current and increase the potential, then the amoeba resumes its active stage and continues to live. That, in a few words, Sir Lauder, is the result of our studies of the very interesting phenomena of death. Have you any help for us? Any criticism? Would you like to see an amoeba under these circumstances come near death and yet live again? Or would you like to see an apple breathe?"

"This is all very remarkable, Miss Van Why. The most interesting thing to me is that practically every statement you have made has been known to me for some time, but I could never put the facts together so as to enable me to arrive at any logical or valuable conclusion. You have the divine touch that makes the dry bones of science alive and vital. I have an idea that your lecture can be commercialized.

As I understand it, all of your fruit is brought enormous distances in iced cars. No doubt the expense is great. Yet in the constantly revolving wheels under the cars you have a potential source of electricity. Why not let me make a little invention, so that these fruit cars can be constantly charged with electricity generated by the revolving wheels in contact with brushes and thus, as the potential of the fruit is constantly maintained, it will reach the consumer in a perfectly healthy condition. If you have no objection, I will patent this idea and see if I cannot sell it to the parties most interested. I will make you a fifty-fifty partner. What say?"

THE little biologist laughed. "I have always heard that you Scots were canny and apt to pinch the penny. You come here to learn about death and almost before I finish, you see the way of adding to your fortune. Go ahead and success to you. Money does not mean anything to me, except to give me additional resources to finance my experiments. I notice that my little laboratory girls like it; they rave over every increase I am able to give them. Suppose you have dinner with my brother and me. We might be able to increase our potential, if we put some steak into our gastro-intestinal tract."

DURING the entire lecture, John Van Why had apparently continued to read his copy of *Vogue*. In reality he had paid the closest attention to every word his sister had said. He had not only listened, but there had been some very rapid and intensive thinking. However, he was a charming companion at the dinner table and in every way confirmed the oft-repeated statement of his sister, "that when John wanted to be nice, he could be very nice indeed."

The next week John Van Why was a constant visitor at his sister's laboratory. There was a great attempt on his part to learn all there was to learn about the potential of the amoeba and apple. His studious attention pleased and worried his sister. The year before, a week of such activity had been followed by a prolonged debauch, and Anna Van Why was too keen a psychologist not to realize that in certain respects the behavior of her brother was, to say the least, abnormal.

Finally he had mastered the delicate technique of every experiment. He had studied the amoeba and exhausted the possibilities of the apple. Even a few rabbits, a dog, and a calf had succumbed to his scientific zeal. Then his enthusiasm died down; he ceased to work hours every day, and to all appearances re-

sumed his former indolent habits. But he did not get drunk. His sister was more amazed than ever. Had she known what was really back of all his efforts to learn her technique, she would have been more than surprised.

JOHAN Van Why belonged to the Paint and Powder Club, one of the most exclusive and peculiar clubs in New York City. It was seclusive as well as exclusive, but at the same time there was an interesting bond among the members. It was not a bond of extreme sociability, either. Two interesting stories were told, which illustrated the exclusiveness of the membership and their relations to each other. The oldest member gave a dinner in honor of the youngest member. When asked why he had done so, he replied that he had been a member of this club for over fifty years and this young man had been the first member to offer him a cigarette. The other story tells of an old member who had gone into the reading room and died there. He was dead for three days before anyone knew it, because of an unwritten law which forbade anyone from speaking to, or in any other way disturbing the meditations of, a member in this room. No doubt both stories were greatly exaggerated, but they were often repeated and much

enjoyed by the entire membership.

Back of the eminent respectability of the club was a sinister shadow. It was a prerequisite that each member be in some way a criminal, a deliberate law violator. But he must be clever enough to preclude any possibility of ever being caught.

At the time John Van Why became interested in the potential of amoeba, a large majority of the membership of the Paint and Powder Club were bootleg specialists. In other words, they were specialists in the sale of every commodity whose sale was forbidden either by state or national law. Alcoholic beverages of every kind, narcotics, erotica in literature and dainty femininity, all provided the club members a reason for belonging to the club that specialized in providing society methods for enjoying themselves. John Van Why was considered one of the most brilliant members of the organization; his peculiar gifts as a biological chemist enabled him to support himself in more than one twisted method. And this was the peculiar bond between the membership, namely, the fact that every one of them should have been behind the bars and, while each one knew enough about the others to put them all there, up to the present time not one had ever been sen-

tenced, for a part of the solemn obligation of membership was a sacred promise to commit suicide if the coils of the law ever threatened undue publicity and exposure of any particular member.

It had been over six months since Van Why had thought of anything new in the way of bootleg industry. His fellow members chided him with the fact and accused him of growing old. It was therefore with a feeling of keen enjoyment that he entered the club one evening and asked a few of his special companions in fashionable crime to join him in one of the private card rooms. While the room was well protected against eavesdroppers, still Van Why was careful to talk in a low voice.

"How about forming a new company, gentlemen? There are five of us. Would you care to put in twenty thousand each?"

The general answer was favorable, provided the company would pay.

"I am sure it will pay," Van Why assured them. "Do you think that I would invest that much if I didn't see several hundred per cent return in the next year? Of course I won't give you the details. Some of you would not understand them if I did, but here are the simple facts—"

He talked for over two hours and at the end of that time the

company was formed. It was decided that the stock should be paid for in cash at once and that every member of the company should start at once as a salesman.

"And if you work it right," said Van Why, "we will have plenty of business."

IT WAS exactly a year later than Anna Van Why had an interesting caller. He was none other than the Chief of the Secret Service of the City of New York. This department was so operated that only a few knew of its existence, and no one except the Governor and the Mayor of the city knew who was at the head of it. However, the chief, with a fine sense of human value, made no effort to conceal either his name or his position from the little biological chemist.

"We are in trouble," he said, "and the big part of our worry is that we do not know enough. About eight months ago the first of a peculiar series of deaths occurred in New York. Later on there were a few similar deaths in other of the large cities, but most of them have been in New York. There is something odd about these fatalities, something so mysterious and strange that the best of our physicians and pathologists are absolutely at sea. The fact is that these persons have died without any real

cause for doing so. We heard that you knew more about death than almost anyone else, so I decided to come and ask you for help. Will you give it?"

"Certainly. How many cases are under suspicion?"

"Twelve that we have quietly investigated."

"Any complete autopsies?"

"Yes, and one by Bruner. You know, he is the best pathologist in the State. On three cases there was a complete chemical examination to determine the presence of poisons. We found nothing; absolutely nothing."

"In any of these cases was there any reason why the person should want to die?"

"That is hard to answer. Some of the men seemed to have everything to live for. In other cases, there might have been reasons, family trouble, threatening financial failure."

"Did you consider a wave of suicides?"

"Yes, but when a person kills himself he generally leaves some sign. He must use some means which will leave at least a trace of its action."

"That is true. Of course, in the East, the mystics die simply because they want to."

"We are not in the East. These men are Catholics and Methodists, and do not show, either in their lives or education, even the remotest knowledge of any pe-

culiar types of religious cults."

"A final question. Here are twelve deaths. Is there any one fact that is in any way common to all of them or half of them?"

"Yes, so far they have all been men."

"Anything else?"

The Chief thought a while—

"Perhaps this may interest you. All were over fifty and wealthy."

"Part of it does. When a man reaches that age, he either wants to live or he wants to die. If he is wealthy he wants to live. Death to a wealthy man at that age is very unpleasant."

"Death is always unpleasant."

"I cannot agree with you. At times it comes as one of the greatest blessings man can ask from the gods. Will you do me a favor? Send me one of the best operators you know of; give him funds enough to handle any emergency and let me work on this problem with him. For the time being, forget that there is a problem. But if you ever hear from us, act quickly?"

"What kind of a man do you want?"

"A brilliant man, who looks as though he did not know very much."

"Those are hard to find. The poor lookers are usually the poor doing kind. I will see what I can do. Will you send us regular reports?"

"We are not going to send you anything till we are all through."

"That is unusual, Miss Van Why."

The little lady grew cold. "I thought you came here for help? Take it—or leave it."

"I see. How about your charges?"

"Pay your detective. I am a biologist, not a crime-hound."

The Chief laughed. He had to. Then he asked one more question: "Do you belong to the book-a-month club that specializes in detective stories?"

"I do not. I still have enough intelligence to select my own literature."

And that was the end of the interview.

SOME weeks later, in fact so much later that Anna Van Why had nearly forgotten the incident, a card was brought to her by her secretary. It had simply one word on it—

T A I N E

"Who is he, Elenore?"

"Blest if I know. Just looks like an ordinary, dried up, middle aged man to me. He said that he had an appointment with you."

"If he had, I have forgotten it. Send him in to my private office."

She found that the man was indeed very ordinary, middle aged, small and dried up. He was almost as small as she was.

With the ability acquired through long years, she looked the visitor over very carefully for a few seconds before she spoke.

"Well, what is it? This is my busy day," she said.

"My name is Taine, madam."

"I got that from your card. What can I do for you?"

The man simply handed her another card. On it the astonished woman read:

"This is the man you wanted."

"I don't want any man," she exclaimed. She had, for the moment, completely lost sight of the conversation of long ago with the Chief. "What were you to see me about? A position as janitor?"

"I guess I will have to tell you," the man said with a sigh. "I thought probably you would recognize the name, but since you don't, I will have to tell you. Some weeks ago you asked the Chief of the New York Secret Service to send you a detective that was brilliant and at the same time looked like an imbecile. I am the man. Taine, from San Francisco."

A N N A Van Why flushed almost pink.

"It was not as bad as that. I never said anything about looking feeble-minded. What I wanted was a rather ordinary looking man who was a brilliant detec-

tive. I remember it all now. The Chief wanted me to help him on an investigation that had him puzzled. So you are Mr. Taine. I wonder why the Chief sent to California for an operator?"

"Because he could not get the man he wanted any other place."

The biologist began to laugh.

"Excuse my slang but you don't hate yourself very much, do you?"

"Sometimes, but here is the way it is with me and the Chief. Three years ago I was offered that position, and I did not want it, so I recommended another man for it and that man is the present Chief. Naturally he feels under obligations. He used to work under me."

"Just why did you refuse? That is the best position of its kind in America—at least so it seems to me."

"It is a good position, but we have lived in San Francisco for a long time, and my wife has been President of the Ladies' Aid Society in her church for the last twelve years. She just about runs it. She had an idea that if we moved to New York, it would take her a long time to become acquainted in the church—so she says, 'Let's stay here where we are known.' Besides, there are a lot of Chinamen there and I like to work with them."

"I see."

"Let's get started with our

work. Just what do you want me to do?"

"Didn't the Chief tell you?"

"Not a word."

"All right. Then we can start from the beginning. There have been a number of mysterious deaths in New York and you are here to find out about them."

"Good. Tell me about them."

ANNA Van Why told him all she had learned from the Chief.

As he listened, he looked every bit the dull man that the biologist had asked for. So true was he to the type, that the biologist was annoyed, and ended by saying sharply:

"I trust you have been paying attention."

"Yes, ma'am. I have been listening to you talk; but so far you haven't said anything."

"What do you mean?"

You have not given me a single point to start with."

"That is your business."

"I see. Now tell me this: Why are you in this game?"

"For years I have studied death. The Chief heard this and came to me."

"And you told him to send a detective to you?"

"Yes."

"What did you want with the detective, Miss Van Why?"

"I thought—it seemed to be a job for a detective"

Taine smiled conservatively.

"I believe you are right."

"Of course I am right."

"Suppose you tell me what you have learned about death."

So she told him about her amoeba experiments.

When she finished he looked more foolish than ever. At last he said: "It all seems very interesting, but how do the amoeba feel about it?"

And that was the final straw. She decided that the man must be either fool or a liar. Surely such a dumb mind could never have qualified for the position of Chief of the Secret Service of a great city like New York. As far as she was concerned, the conversation was ended, but Taine did not seem disposed to go.

"I would like to see one of those amoeba," he said.

"I will have my assistant show you some," the biologist said rather curtly. She was beginning to be thoroughly bored with the man. "I am so busy that I have no time to spend with you myself."

TAINE had a thoroughly good time with the assistant. In a few minutes he was chatting with her as though they had known each other for years. And before he left, he learned that a man by the name of Sir Lauder of Edinburgh had once visited the laboratory and had listened

to a lecture on the potential of apples. He found out something else.

He went back to see the chief.

"How did you like Miss Van Why?" that worthy asked.

"You ask her how she liked me. She was so impressed by my dumbness that she actually became annoyed with me. However, I am ready to get to work and the next time you hear from me I will have something to tell you. Do me a favor. 'Phone to the little lady and tell her that you had made a mistake; that you were going to use a local man, and that Taine was going back to San Francisco. She will feel happier to know it and I do not want her to bother me in any way. She is very much of a woman and you know they are peculiar in some ways. She will be delighted to know that I was sent back to San Francisco as incompetent. Now suppose we go over the case as far as you have the details."

The two men were closeted for over three hours. At the end of that time Taine left, with the simple request that if he ever called for help, the chief should not waste any time responding.

"Because," said Taine, "when I ask for help, I sure need it."

IT WAS some months after that talk between the Chief and Taine that a young bootlegger of

the alcoholic type took John Van Why into one of the private card rooms at the Paint and Powder Club.

"I have a chance to make a killing for every member of the club, John, if you go in on the deal with us."

"Meaning what?" was the disinterested reply.

"Meaning at least a million for all of us."

"Applesauce."

"Not at all—the real thing. I have felt some of the gold. I ought to know."

"Some new kind of graft? Bootleg? Vice? There certainly cannot be anything new. If any outsider came and told us something new, I would be ashamed of our membership."

"I admit that. This is nothing new in a way, but it certainly is new as far as the business side of it is concerned. This old chap can give every one of the boys pointers in his particular line of bootleg. He is a veritable mine of information in regard to all of our specialities."

"What does he want?"

"A chance to put his proposition before us. Says he will make us all millionaires if we listen to him."

"Why didn't you listen?"

"He wouldn't talk. Said he wants to entertain the membership at a banquet, when he will give us his entire program."

"Well, suppose we all go?"

"That is not the point. He wants to entertain us in the club."

Van Why frowned.

"That's different. You know the rules. No one not a member can pass the front door."

"I know that, but you are Chairman of the Rules Commission. You can secure the necessary permission."

"Is that all you want?"

"Absolutely."

"All right. I was afraid you had something else up your sleeve. Go ahead. Tell him to throw the banquet. You are sure you understand him? He's going to give us each a million?"

"Not give it to us—make it possible for us to earn it in a short time."

"That's about the same thing, if the time is short enough. Get word to the members and have them all here. If it is a good thing for one, it is a good thing for all, and you know our obligation. Tell him that as the Chairman of the Rules Committee I ought to have a bonus for letting him in."

"He appreciated that and sent you this piece of jade. Said it was an inferior kind of present, but would you accept it. You need not be bashful. I got one just like it and sold it yesterday for ten thousand."

"You made one mistake, Amer-

son," said Van Why. "You should have told him I was twins and needed two. You attend to the details and I will see the boys."

TWO weeks later the banquet was given to the thirty-nine members. That was the entire membership. Their boast was that they would be equal to the 40 Thieves of Bagdad just as soon as they found a man bad enough to be worthy of the last place. Naturally, that finishing touch was never given. The thirty-nine members and two Chinese guests made forty-one at the table. They were seated twenty on each side, with the host at the head. He was most wonderfully clad in stiff silken robes, heavy with gold thread and encrusted with jewels. At times he talked in Chinese to the interpreter on his left; at times he was silent; but always he kept his fan slowly moving in his hand. The other Chinaman was in European dress, and in every way appeared to be enjoying the evening.

It was evidently one to be remembered. None of the members of the Paint and Powder Club, not even the most blasé, had ever spent one like it. From the finding of the presents at the table, from the drinking of the first cocktail, to the rendering of the last act of an ultra-Parisian cabaret, no effort was spared to

adequately entertain every one of the Nine and Thirty Thieves. And when the end came, the food was cleared away, the servants had departed and the doors were locked; every member was unanimous in the declaration that Ching-Lee or What'sisname was a prince of a good fellow and no mistake would be made in electing him to membership.

Then the smaller Chinaman stood up and started to talk. He explained that he was private secretary to his master, who was a great man in China. He was not worthy to repeat the thought of this great man but as no one else in the audience could understand the Chinese language, it would be necessary for him to act as interpreter. His master would say a few words and then he would translate them. This would take time, but he was sure that they would be repaid in the end. There might be a little difficulty in putting all of his master's thoughts into fluent English, but they would, no doubt, excuse him for any grammatical blunders.

With this introduction, the Chinaman at the head of the table without rising, started to talk in his native language. After a few minutes he paused and that much of his speech was repeated in English. After eight pauses he came to a final pause, and this is what he said:

MOST illustrious and wonderful merchants of the Western World. I feel that I am unworthy of eating with you or venturing to address such a noble gathering of upright and successful business men. You will pardon my audacity in presuming to sit with you at the same table. From far away China I have come, learning of your wisdom and success in life.

"It is my hope to begin business dealings with you which will be worthy of your illustrious attention. For some years a group of merchants in China have undertaken, in a small way, the varied business which occupies your time. These merchants have thought it wise to elect me their president. By a spirit of co-operation we have been able to assume control of all this commerce in the East. Last year we did a total business of over two thousand million; in your business circles this would appear small, especially the profits of twenty-three per cent of the gross, but we felt that it was very fair.

"With the hope of increasing this pitiful success, we decided to ask the great men of the West to become our partners and we therefore have in mind a new company, the western office of which will be in New York City. We need more than a few men to join this company, all of them

being expert in this particular line of trade. I have therefore suggested to my Board of Directors that we give these men, each one of them, five millions in stock, and in addition a present of one million in gold, if they agree to our proposal. I have the stock certificates downstairs; also the gold. As I felt that some of you would prefer paper, I have a number of millions in United States bonds and large bills. If we can come to terms, I will transfer this to you to-night.

"It is not fair to ask you to join without having a definite idea of our resources. First is our control of the opium and morphine trade. We are soon going to have the entire trade in our hands and have unlimited facilities for placing it in any part of the world. That, with cocaine, forms a large part of our pitifully small business. Then I know that you are interested in alcoholics. My association has the names of over thirty-five thousand of the big bootleggers in the United States. We have each man card-indexed. We know his habits and the extent of his business; we know his customers. If you join us we will promise you that inside of three months all of those thirty-five thousand men will either be dead or fleeing for their lives. Our control of the Tongs in your

country makes this promise easy to keep. Once these men are dead, some of you who are specialists in this line will assume charge of this wonderful industry, which your remarkable country has so energetically fostered by your most wise laws.

"No doubt some of you are interested in the fair sex. We control the sale and use of women in the East and there is no reason why we should not, by the same business methods, control it in the western hemisphere. As you know, most of the men engaged in this business are rather timid in their speculations, but with men of intelligence interested, the entire business can be run on an honorable and highly profitable scale.

LIKE all of my countrymen, I am interested in fine jewels and precious stones. It is a shame that these are kept from your countrymen by the high tariff. All that will be changed under the direction of our new company and the evasion of unjust taxes will constitute a large part of our profits. This phase of the business of the company will be in the hands of those of you who are best suited by past experience to handle it.

"We will also control the bootleg business in fine books. What a sad commentary on your peerless civilization to think that

there are so many books that cannot be bought openly in your shops. I feel that, as far as culture is concerned, we are doing your populace a great favor in making the books, illustrations and art of past and present ages easily available to the collector and lover of this form of art.

"Thus we come to you with gifts in our unworthy hands. We have been able to succeed, but we need your help. We wish to establish the control of euthanasia, which is sadly needed in our own country. No doubt the lives of you glorious sons of the West are so carefree that you need no such word in your vocabulary, but in the East, life at times becomes impossible, especially for our business antagonists. For centuries we have experimented in this form of trade, but feel that all of our methods are ancient and antiquated compared with the brilliant form your wisdom has lately discovered. We bring you everything from the East and only ask that you allow us to take back this wonderful secret to our needy friends."

THUS came the end of the address. The secretary spoke of his own initiative:

"And now, gentlemen, you have heard the master. At each place you will find a little pencil and a little card. If you will sign

your name and your specialty and your willingness to become a director in this new company, I will be glad to send for the gold and stock certificates. They are downstairs waiting for your disposal, thirty-nine million in cash and for each man five million in stock. You can form your own company and elect your own officers for the western half of the combine. I assure you that my master is able to keep his promise in every way."

There was a hasty conference, a babble of low whispers, but at the end thirty-nine signed pledges were in the hands of the secretary. He went to the locked door, unlocked it, gave an order to the waiting servant and went back to his seat. Soon five men staggered up, carrying baskets filled with greenbacks and gold coins. The gold coins were in canvas bags, but the secretary opened one of these on the table and out poured twenty dollar gold pieces, like so many marbles out of a sack. He took them by handfuls and tossed them over the table.

"Look at them, gentlemen; the genuine article."

"Well, give us our six million," demanded one of the men almost hysterically.

"We will be glad to do so, but first we must know the wonderful secret of your new method of euthanasia."

"What does he mean?" asked a man to his neighbor.

But that man walked around to the back of John Van Why's chair.

"You have to tell him, John."

"I am not going to."

"You have got to!"

"I won't!!"

The controversy attracted the attention of all. Finally the two Chinamen whispered. Then the secretary arose.

"The condition of this entire agreement," he said, "was that my master take back with him the priceless secret of euthanasia, which was discovered by one of your members. I believe the name is Van Why. It now seems that the gentleman does not wish to contribute this secret toward the good of the new company. Under these circumstances my master feels that the negotiations are at an end, and expresses his profound regret that the new company is impossible. He requests me to have the thirty-nine million carried to a place of safety."

And he started to the door. A dozen excited men blocked his path, another dozen surrounded Van Why, imploring him to act in a decent, sensible manner, while others forgot that the dignified Chinaman did not understand a word of English and excitedly told him that he would be given any secret the club possessed.

AMID the confusion, the dignified Oriental never changed his countenance, never lost a stroke of his fan. He gazed on the surging club members as though they were shadow men on the silver screen. He hardly looked interested. Finally Van Why called for silence.

"I'll give in," he said. "I had a good thing and I wanted to hold onto it, but I see that it is for our good to listen to this man. So you boys stay here, and I will take the two into my bedroom and tell them about it. Don't touch that gold till I come back. You will kill each other if you decide to try and divide it. Come on, you two men, let's get through with it."

The secretary muttered a few words to his master and then the three left the room. The remaining thirty-eight men looked at each other with anxious drawn faces.

"My word!" exclaimed one of the men. "What did they give us to drink? This has certainly been a night to remember." He suddenly drew his revolver and pointed it at one of the men. "Stop! Hands off that gold. When one gets it, we all do."

Twenty minutes passed and then another twenty and an hour. They were all seated now around the table, smoking. Suddenly the door opened and a group of policemen rushed in.

"Everybody! Hands up!" ordered the plain clothes man at the head of a squad of police.

"What's the charge, Officer," asked one of the calmest.

"Talk to headquarters," was the reply.

"I have always said," was the man's whispered answer, "that they would never get me alive." No one seemed to hear him, but he put a ring in his mouth, bit on it and in thirty seconds was dead. The other men, less brave or more sane, according to the viewpoint, filed sadly out to the waiting wagon. One of the last of them looked pitifully at the baskets of gold and paper money.

"Say, Officer," he begged, "you're not going to let that lie around loose, are you?"

The inspector laughed. "That's all right. Just stage stuff."

AN HOUR later Anna Van Why was awakened by her telephone.

"This Miss Van Why? This is Police Headquarters. Sorry to tell you your brother John is dead. Yes. Hit by a taxi on Broadway; no signs of injury, but he died at once. Must have suffered a fractured skull. No, he was not drunk. Only an accident. Seems he was trying to get an old lady out of danger and got hit himself. We sent the body to Morgan's Parlors till you decide what to do."

The little white-haired woman stayed awake for the rest of the night. Over and over she said to herself, "I am so glad that he died sober: I am so glad he died sober trying to help the poor old lady; I am so glad—so glad—"

It was not till morning that she started to cry.

The next morning at ten a little insignificant man called at the unmarked office of the Chief of the Secret Service.

"I am through, Chief," said Taine. "I want to report and go back to San Francisco. Wife writes that there is going to be a Church Social of some kind and thinks I ought to be there. You know she is the president of the Ladies' Aid Society and every once in a while she makes me go with her."

The chief smiled. "How often I have heard that line. Forget it and tell me what happened, because I am just about bursting with curiosity. What shall we do with those thirty-seven crooks you had us pinch?"

"Let your judgment be your guide. Here is a signed confession from every one giving his name, his special line of bootleg and his willingness to join some kind of a society for the further promulgation of vice. There is a card here for each man. One man killed himself, but the others were too yellow. I fancy your men will be able to identify most

of them and you can handle them as you wish. They had nothing much to do with those peculiar deaths you asked me to investigate. These here men are just extra fish that got into my net."

"But how about the deaths? Have a cigar while you tell me."

"Thanks, but I never smoke. Nicotine hurts the delicate enamel of the teeth and once that goes they soon decay. Ever hear that line before? Well, I will save your life by telling you briefly what I did. Anna Van Why was the key. She knew more than she wanted to know, only she didn't know it. I found out from one of her assistants that the dear old lady had given a lecture on a new cause of death to an Edinburgh man, Sir Lauder, and that at that time the half brother, John Van Why was there. It seems that John was brilliant and bad, while the sister, Anna, was brilliant and good. Same father but different mothers. So I investigated John and found he belonged to the Paint and Powder Club. That was just a name for a den of organized vice of every kind. In your cells you have as sweet a collection of degenerates as was ever collected. No vice without its representatives there, and every one claiming to be a perfect gentleman.

I FOUND they were all bad and that some of them were poor.

So I sprang some parlor theatricals on them and they fell for it. I got Sam Lee, a pretty good Chinaman I know here, but dumb as they make them, to pose as a rich mandarin and I went along as his private secretary. I told Sam I would give him fifty bucks, so you add that to my expense account. Well, I gave them a good strong line and at the end offered to make them millionaires if they would give me the secret of their euthanasia, which means painless death. Of course I was shooting in the dark, but the secret came out. John Van Why had been doing the stunt and they knew it. John didn't want to tell, but the others forced him, so we went to his room. There he sat down and told us that he and three others in the club had formed a company, called EUTHANASIA LIMITED. He furnished the brains and the machinery and the others brought in the trade. He said that there had been sixteen killed so far at twenty-five thousand each. A few of them had made their own arrangements because they were tired of life, but in all the other cases the arrangements for the death had been made by a wife or child to enable the heirs to inherit the property. I do not want to take the time telling you about it, but Anna Van Why had found that every living thing had what she called a potential,

a definite amount of electricity of some kind—and you take this potential from the amoeba—that's a kind of bug, Chief—or from an apple, or rabbit or man and they just die. So John, he invents a Morris chair and when the person sits on it, the electrical apparatus in the cushion somehow reduces this potential and he just dies there, in the chair, and the family thinks he died of heart failure or something. Rather cute idea. I told him point blank that I did not believe him, so he says, "Here is one of the chairs, and shows me just how it works. At that, I pull my gun on him and tell him he is under arrest. He is, of course, rather horrified and asks if he can sit down for a few minutes. I never think a thing and *what* does he do but sit right down on that chair and turn on all the power and in five minutes he is dead. Died before I realized what was killing him. I sent for the policeman I had stationed at the nearby phone and they pinched the gang. Then I had the undertaker come for John and the other man that swallowed the poison, and then I thought of that poor sister, so I phoned her and told her John was hit by an automobile while he was trying to help a poor old lady, and that he was a brave man and not drunk when he died. That will make her feel better and I gave

that story to the press, so of course he is a hero. And there won't be any more mysterious deaths—at least not that kind. Can I go home, Chief?"

The chief looked at the little insignificant man with awe.

"You are a wonder, Taine," he finally said. "You are sure a wonder. What do we owe you?"

"Whatever you think is right. My wife takes ten per cent for

her society so the more you give me the better off the church will be. You send me a check. But please don't ever tell Miss Van Why what really happened. She is one nice old lady, even though she did think I was a fool."

That day marked the end, not only of the Paint and Powder Club, but also of Euthanasia Limited.

THE END

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39)

of my lady Vanue. And for Firko's conduct during the whole time, I had the utmost admiration. I now had two leaders—and not fools. The future looked bright for me.

The tiny bits of matter which Firko had brought from Small Focii we placed, according to his directions from the little people, in great hospital rooms where the sick of the still-living Nortans were brought. The patients were treated for one day and night, then were returned to their homes to make room for others.

Their recovery after exposure to the cleansing micro-life from Heavy Enn was remarkable. The tiny, invisible men from Small Focii must have been redoubtable fighters, or had equipped themselves with weapons vastly superior to anything the savage race of the Jotun culture could obtain. For during the exposure to a chamber in which a bit of the matter from Small Focii was placed, the Nortans recovered their wits almost entirely. Firko assured me that as the connecting nerve fibers be-

tween the brain cells healed completely, they would be nearly as intelligent as before their infection. But it would be a long, long time before Nor city assumed its old magnificence and joyous ways of life.

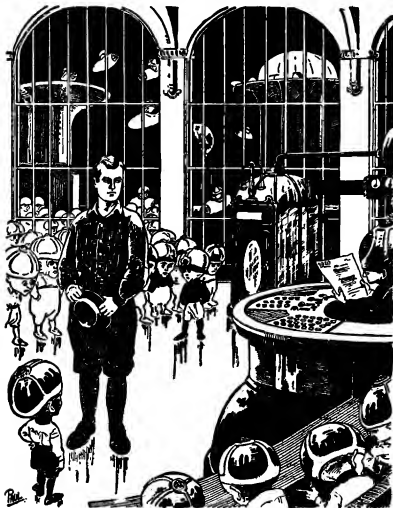
I suspect that the whole affair had been good for those who lived through the thing. For never again would a Nor man be taken by surprise, not so long as the memory of the Jotun rebellion lived. Never again, under any conditions, would an unchecked mind with an inimical intent enter a Nortan stronghold. And I knew that Arl and I, and perhaps Firko and Vanue, would one day return to live again in Nor, for love does not die.

☆ ☆ ☆

... *Morn,*
Waked by the circling hours, with rosy
hand
Unbarred the Mount of God. There is
a cave
Within the Mount, fast by his throne ...
John Milton

The COMING of the ICE

~ By G. Peyton Wertenbaker ~



Strange men these creatures of the hundredth century . . .

A Classic Reprint from AMAZING STORIES, June, 1926

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

One of the gravest editorial problems faced by the editors of *AMAZING STORIES* when they launched its first issue, dated April, 1926, was the problem of finding or developing authors who could write the type of story they needed. As a stop-gap, the first two issues of *AMAZING STORIES* were devoted entirely to reprints. But reprints were to constitute a declining portion of the publication's contents for the following four years. The first new story the magazine bought was *Coming of the Ice*, by G. Peyton Wertenbaker, which appeared in its third issue. Wertenbaker was not technically a newcomer to science fiction, since he had sold his first story to Gernsback's *SCIENCE AND INVENTION*, *The Man From the Atom*, in 1923 when he was only 16! Now, at the ripe old age of 19, he was appearing in the world's first

truly complete science fiction magazine.

The scope of his imagination was truly impressive and, despite the author's youth, *Coming of the Ice* builds to a climax of considerable power.

Wertenbaker, under the name of Green Peyton, went on to sell his first novel, *Black Cabin*, in 1933. He eventually became an authority on the Southwest with many regional volumes to his credit: *For God and Texas*, *America's Heartland*, *The Southwest*, and *San Antonio, City of the Sun*. But he never lost his interest in space travel, assisting Hubertis Strughold on the writing of *The Green and Red Planet*, a scientific appraisal of the possibilities of life on the planet Mars published in 1953. He also served for a time as London correspondent for *FORTUNE MAGAZINE*.

IT IS strange to be alone, and so cold. To be the last man on earth. . . .

The snow drives silently about me, ceaselessly, drearily. And I am isolated in this tiny white, indistinguishable corner of a blurred world, surely the loneliest creature in the universe. How many thousands of years is

it since I last knew the true companionship? For a long time I have been lonely, but there were people, creatures of flesh and blood. Now they are gone. Now I have not even the stars to keep me company, for they are all lost in an infinity of snow and twilight here below.

If only I could know how long

it has been since first I was imprisoned upon the earth. It cannot matter now. And yet some vague dissatisfaction, some faint instinct, asks over and over in my throbbing ears: What year? What year?

It was in the year 1930 that the great thing began in my life. There was then a very great man who performed operations on his fellows to compose their vitals—we called such men surgeons. John Granden wore the title "Sir" before his name, in indication of nobility by birth according to the prevailing standards in England. But surgery was only a hobby of Sir John's, if I must be precise, for, while he had achieved an enormous reputation as a surgeon, he always felt that his real work lay in the experimental end of his profession. He was, in a way, a dreamer, but a dreamer who could make his dreams come true.

I was a very close friend of Sir John's. In fact, we shared the same apartments in London. I have never forgotten that day when he first mentioned to me his momentous discovery. I had just come in from a long sleigh-ride in the country with Alice, and I was seated drowsily in the window-seat, writing idly in my mind a description of the wind and the snow and the grey twilight of the evening. It is strange, is it not, that my tale

should begin and end with the snow and the twilight.

Sir John opened suddenly a door at one end of the room and came hurrying across to another door. He looked at me, grinning rather like a triumphant maniac.

"It's coming!" he cried, without pausing, "I've almost got it!" I smiled at him: he looked very ludicrous at that moment.

"What have you got?" I asked.

"Good Lord, man, the Secret—the Secret!" And then he was gone again, the door closing upon his victorious cry, "The Secret!"

I was, of course, amused. But I was also very much interested. I knew Sir John well enough to realize that, however amazing his appearance might be, there would be nothing absurd about his "Secret"—whatever it was. But it was useless to speculate. I could only hope for enlightenment at dinner. So I immersed myself in one of the surgeon's volumes from his fine Library of Imagination, and waited.

I think the book was one of Mr. H. G. Wells', probably "The Sleeper Awakes," or some other of his brilliant fantasies and predictions, for I was in a mood conducive to belief in almost anything when, later, we sat down together across the table. I only wish I could give some idea of the atmosphere that permeated our apartments, the reality it

lent to whatever was vast and amazing and strange. You could then, whoever you are, understand a little the ease with which I accepted Sir John's new discovery.

He began to explain it to me at once, as though he could keep it to himself no longer.

"Did you think I had gone mad, Dennell?" he asked. "I quite wonder that I haven't. Why, I have been studying for many years—for most of my life—on this problem. And, suddenly, I have solved it! Or, rather, I am afraid I have solved another one much greater."

"Tell me about it, but for God's sake don't be technical."

"Right," he said. Then he paused. "Dennell, it's *magnificent!* It will change everything that is in the world." His eyes held mine suddenly with the fatality of a hypnotist's. "Dennell, it is the Secret of Eternal Life," he said.

"Good Lord, Sir John!" I cried, half inclined to laugh.

"I mean it," he said. "You know I have spent most of my life studying the processes of birth, trying to find out precisely what went on in the whole history of conception."

"You have found out?"

"No, that is just what amuses me. I have discovered something else without knowing yet what causes either process.

"I don't want to be technical, and I know very little of what actually takes place myself. But I can try to give you some idea of it."

IT IS thousands, perhaps millions of years since Sir John explained to me. What little I understood at the time I may have forgotten, yet I try to reproduce what I can of his theory.

"In my study of the processes of birth," he began, "I discovered the rudiments of an action which takes place in the bodies of both men and women. There are certain properties in the foods we eat that remain in the body for the reproduction of life, two distinct Essences, so to speak, of which one is retained by the woman, another by the man. It is the union of these two properties that, of course, creates the child.

"Now, I made a slight mistake one day in experimenting with a guinea-pig, and I re-arranged certain organs which I need not describe so that I thought I had completely messed up the poor creature's abdomen. It lived, however, and I laid it aside. It was some years later that I happened to notice it again. It had not given birth to any young, but I was amazed to note that it had apparently grown no older: it seemed precisely in the same state of growth in which I had left it.

"From that I built up. I re-examined the guinea-pig, and observed it carefully. I need not detail my studies. But in the end I found that my 'mistake' had in reality been a momentous discovery. I found that I had only to close certain organs, to rearrange certain ducts, and to open certain dormant organs, and, *mirabile dictu*, the whole process of reproduction was changed.

"You have heard, of course, that our bodies are continually changing, hour by hour, minute by minute, so that every few years we have been literally re-born. Some such principle as this seems to operate in reproduction, except that, instead of the old body being replaced by the new, and in its form, approximately, the new body is created apart from it. It is the creation of children that causes us to die, it would seem, because if this activity is, so to speak, damned up or turned aside into new channels, the reproduction operates on the old body, renewing it continually. It is very obscure and very absurd, is it not? But the most absurd part of it is that it is true. Whatever the true explanation may be, the fact remains that the operation can be done, that it actually prolongs life indefinitely, and that I alone know the secret."

Sir John told me a very great

deal more, but, after all, I think it amounted to little more than this. It would be impossible for me to express the great hold his discovery took upon my mind the moment he recounted it. From the very first, under the spell of his personality, I believed, and I knew he was speaking the truth. And it opened up before me new vistas. I began to see myself become suddenly eternal, never again to know the fear of death. I could see myself storing up, century after century, an amplitude of wisdom and experience that would make me truly a god.

"Sir John!" I cried, long before he was finished, "You must perform that operation on me!"

"But, Dennell, you are too hasty. You must not put yourself so rashly into my hands."

"You have perfected the operation, haven't you?"

"That is true," he said.

"You must try it out on somebody, must you not?"

"Yes, of course. And yet—somehow, Dennell, I am afraid. I cannot help feeling that man is not yet prepared for such a vast thing. There are sacrifices. One must give up love and all sensual pleasure. This operation not only takes away the mere fact of reproduction, but it deprives one of all the things that go with sex, all love, all sense of beauty, all feeling for poetry and the arts. It leaves only the few emotions,

selfish emotions, that are necessary to self-preservation. Do you not see? One becomes an intellect, nothing more—a cold apothecosis of reason. And I, for one, cannot face such a thing calmly.”

“But, Sir John, like many fears, it is largely horrible in the foresight. After you have changed your nature you cannot regret it. What you are would be as horrible an idea to you afterwards as the thought of what you will be seems now.”

“True, true. I know it. But it is hard to face, nevertheless.”

“I am not afraid to face it.”

“You do not understand it, Dennell, I am afraid. And I wonder whether you or I or any of us on this earth are ready for such a step. After all, to make a race deathless, one should be sure it is a perfect race.”

“Sir John,” I said, “it is not you who have to face this, nor any one else in the world till you are ready. But I am firmly resolved, and I demand it of you as my friend.”

Well, we argued much further, but in the end I won. Sir John promised to perform the operation three days later.

. . . But do you perceive now what I had forgotten during all that discussion, the one thing I had thought I could never forget so long as I lived, not even for an instant? It was my love for Alice—I had forgotten that!

I CANNOT write here all the infinity of emotions I experienced later, when, with Alice in my arms, it suddenly came upon me what I had done. Ages ago—I have forgotten how to feel. I could name now a thousand feelings I used to have, but I can no longer even understand them. For only the heart can understand the heart, and the intellect only the intellect.

With Alice in my arms, I told the whole story. It was she who, with her quick instinct, grasped what I had never noticed.

“But Carl!” she cried, “Don’t you see?—It will mean that we can never be married!” And, for the first time, I understood. If only I could re-capture some conception of that love! I have always known, since the last shred of comprehension slipped from me, that I lost something very wonderful when I lost love. But what does it matter? I lost Alice too, and I could not have known love again without her.

We were very sad and very tragic that night. For hours and hours we argued the question over. But I felt somewhat that I was inextricably caught in my fate, that I could not retreat now from my resolve. I was perhaps, very school-boyish, but I felt that it would be cowardice to back out now. But it was Alice again who perceived a final aspect of the matter.

"Carl," she said to me, her lips very close to mine, "it need not come between our love. After all, ours would be a poor sort of love if it were not more of the mind than of the flesh. We shall remain lovers, but we shall forget mere carnal desire. I shall submit to that operation too!"

And I could not shake her from her resolve. I would speak of danger that I could not let her face. But, after the fashion of women, she disarmed me with the accusation that I did not love her, that I did not want her love, that I was trying to escape from love. What answer had I for that, but that I loved her and would do anything in the world not to lose her?

I have wondered sometimes since whether we might have known the love of the mind. Is love something entirely of the flesh, something created by an ironic God merely to propagate His race? Or can there be love without emotion, love without passion—love between two cold intellects? I do not know. I did not ask then. I accepted anything that would make our way more easy.

There is no need to draw out the tale. Already my hand wavers, and my time grows short. Soon there will be no more of me, no more of my tale—no more of **Mankind**. There will be only the snow, and the ice, and the cold . . .

THREE DAYS later I entered John's Hospital with Alice on my arm. All my affairs—and they were few enough—were in order. I had insisted that Alice wait until I had come safely through the operation, before she submitted to it. I had been carefully starved for two days, and I was lost in an unreal world of white walls and white clothes and white lights, drunk with my dreams of the future. When I was wheeled into the operating room on the long, hard table, for a moment it shone with brilliant distinctness, a neat, methodical white chamber, tall and more or less circular. Then I was beneath the glare of soft white lights, and the room faded into a misty vagueness from which little steel rays flashed and quivered from silvery cold instruments. For a moment our hands, Sir John's and mine, gripped, and we were saying good-bye—for a little while—in the way men say these things. Then I felt the warm touch of Alice's lips upon mine, and I felt sudden painful things I cannot describe, that I could not have described then. For a moment I felt that I must rise and cry out that I could not do it. But the feeling passed, and I was passive.

Something was pressed about my mouth and nose, something with an ethereal smell. Staring eyes swam about me from behind

their white masks. I struggled instinctively, but in vain—I was held securely. Infinitesimal points of light began to wave back and forth on a pitch-black background; a great hollow buzzing echoed in my head. My head seemed suddenly to have become all throat, a great, cavernous, empty throat in which sounds and lights were mingled together, in a swift rhythm, approaching, receding eternally. Then, I think, there were dreams. But I have forgotten them. . . .

I began to emerge from the effect of the ether. Everything was dim, but I could perceive Alice beside me, and Sir John.

"Bravely done!" Sir John was saying, and Alice, too, was saying something, but I cannot remember what. For a long while we talked, I speaking the nonsense of those who are coming out from under ether, they teasing me a little solemnly. But after a little while I became aware of the fact that they were about to leave. Suddenly, God knows why, I knew that they must not leave. Something cried in the back of my head that they *must* stay—one cannot explain these things, except by after events. I began to press them to remain, but they smiled and said they must get their dinner. I commanded them not to go; but they spoke kindly and said they would be back before long. I

think I even wept a little, like a child, but Sir John said something to the nurse, who began to reason with me firmly, and then they were gone, and somehow I was asleep. . . .

WHEN I awoke again, my head was fairly clear, but there was an abominable reek of ether all about me. The moment I opened my eyes, I felt that something had happened. I asked for Sir John and for Alice. I saw a swift, curious look that I could not interpret come over the face of the nurse, then she was calm again, her countenance impassive. She reassured me in quick meaningless phrases, and told me to sleep. But I could not sleep: I was absolutely sure that something had happened to them, to my friend and to the woman I loved. Yet all my insistence profited me nothing, for the nurses were a silent lot. Finally, I think, they must have given me a sleeping potion of some sort, for I fell asleep again.

For two endless, chaotic days, I saw nothing of either of them, Alice or Sir John. I became more and more agitated, the nurse more and more taciturn. She would only say that they had gone away for a day or two.

And then, on the third day, I found out. They thought I was asleep. The night nurse had just come in to relieve the other.

"Has he been asking about them again?" she asked.

"Yes, poor fellow. I have hardly managed to keep him quiet."

"We will have to keep it from him until he is recovered fully." There was a long pause, and I could hardly control my labored breathing.

"How sudden it was!" one of them said. "To be killed like that—" I heard no more, for I leapt suddenly up in bed, crying out.

"Quick! For God's sake, tell me what has happened!" I jumped to the floor and seized one of them by the collar. She was horrified. I shook her with a superhuman strength.

"Tell me!" I shouted, "Tell me—Or I'll—!" She told me—what else could she do.

"They were killed in an accident," she gasped, "in a taxi—a collision—the Strand—!" And at that moment a crowd of nurses and attendants arrived, called by the other frantic woman, and they put me to bed again.

I have no memory of the next few days. I was in delirium, and I was never told what I said during my ravings. Nor can I express the feelings I was saturated with when at last I regained my mind again. Between my old emotions and any attempt to put them into words, or even to remember them, lies always that insurmountable wall

of my Change. I cannot understand what I must have felt, I cannot express it.

I only know that for weeks I was sunk in a misery beyond any misery I had ever imagined before. The only two friends I had on earth were gone to me. I was left alone. And, for the first time, I began to see before me all these endless years that would be the same, dull, lonely.

Yet I recovered. I could feel each day the growth of a strange new vigor in my limbs, a vast force that was something tangibly expressive to eternal life. Slowly my anguish began to die. After a week more, I began to understand how my emotions were leaving me, how love and beauty and everything of which poetry was made—how all this was going. I could not bear the thought at first. I would look at the golden sunlight and the blue shadow of the wind, and I would say,

"God! How beautiful!" And the words would echo meaninglessly in my ears. Or I would remember Alice's face, that face I had once loved so inextinguishably, and I would weep and clutch my forehead, and clench my fists, crying.

"O God, how can I live without her!" Yet there would be a little strange fancy in my head at the same moment, saying,

"Who is this Alice? You know

no such person." And truly I would wonder whether she had ever existed.

So, slowly, the old emotions were shed away from me, and I began to joy in a corresponding growth of my mental perceptions. I began to toy idly with mathematical formulae I had forgotten years ago, in the same fashion that a poet toys with a word and its shades of meaning. I would look at everything with new, seeing eyes, new perception, and I would understand things I had never understood before, because formerly my emotions had always occupied me more than my thoughts.

And so the weeks went by, until, one day, I was well.

. . . What, after all, is the use of this chronicle? Surely there will never be men to read it. I have heard them say that the snow will never go. I will be buried, it will be buried with me; and it will be the end of us both. Yet, somehow, it eases my weary soul a little to write. . . .

Need I say that I lived, thereafter, many thousands of thousands of years, until this day? I cannot detail that life. It is a long round of new, fantastic impressions, coming dream-like, one after another, melting into each other. In looking back, as in looking back upon dreams, I seem to recall only a few isolated periods clearly; and it seems

that my imagination must have filled in the swift movement between episodes. I think now, of necessity, in terms of centuries and millennia, rather than days and months. . . . The snow blows terribly about my little fire, and I know it will soon gather courage to quench us both . . .

YEARS passed, at first with a sort of clear wonder. I watched things that took place everywhere in the world. I studied. The other students were much amazed to see me, a man of thirty odd, coming back to college.

"But Judas, Dannel, you've already got your Ph.D! What more do you want?" So they would all ask me. And I would reply;

I want an M.D. and an F.R.C.S." I didn't tell them that I wanted degrees in Law, too, and in Biology and Chemistry, in Architecture and Engineering, in Psychology and Philosophy. Even so, I believe they thought me mad. But poor fools! I would think. They can hardly realize that I have all of eternity before me to study.

I went to school for many decades. I would pass from University to University, leisurely gathering all the fruits of every subject I took up, revelling in study as no student revelled ever before. There was no need of

hurry in my life, no fear of death too soon. There was a magnificence of vigor in my body, and a magnificence of vision and clarity in my brain. I felt myself a super-man. I had only to go on storing up wisdom until the day should come when all knowledge of the world was mine, and then I could command the world. I had no need for hurry. O vast life! How I gloried in my eternity! And how little good it has ever done me, by the irony of God.

For several centuries, changing my name and passing from place to place, I continued my studies. I had no consciousness of monotony, for, to the intellect, monotony cannot exist: it was one of those emotions I had left behind. One day, however, in the year 2132, a great discovery was made by a man called Zarentzov. It had to do with the curvature of space, quite changing the conceptions that we had all followed since Einstein. I had long ago mastered the last detail of Einstein's theory, as had, in time, the rest of the world. I threw myself immediately into the study of this new, epoch-making conception.

To my amazement, it all seemed to me curiously dim and elusive. I could not quite grasp what Zarentzov was trying to formulate.

"Why," I cried, "the thing is a

monstrous fraud!" I went to the professor of Physics in the University I then attended, and I told him it was a fraud, a huge book of mere nonsense. He looked at me rather pityingly.

"I am afraid, Modevski," he said, addressing me by the name I was at the time using, "I am afraid you do not understand it, that is all. When your mind has broadened, you will. You should apply yourself more carefully to your Physics." But that angered me, for I had mastered my Physics before he was ever born. I challenged him to explain the theory. And he did! He put it, obviously, in the clearest language he could. Yet I understood nothing. I stared at him dumbly, until he shook his head impatiently, saying that it was useless, that if I could not grasp it I would simply have to keep on studying. I was stunned. I wandered away in a daze.

For do you see what happened? During all those years I had studied ceaselessly, and my mind had been clear and quick as the day I first had left the hospital. But all that time I had been able only to remain what I was—an extraordinarily intelligent man of the twentieth century. And the rest of the race had been progressing! It had been swiftly gathering knowledge and power and ability all that time, faster and faster, while I had been only

remaining still. And now here was Zarentzov and the teachers of the Universities, and, probably, a hundred intelligent men, who had all outstripped me! I was being left behind.

And that is what happened. I need not dilate further upon it. By the end of that century I had been left behind by all the students of the world, and I never did understand Zarentzov. Other men came with other theories, and these theories were accepted by the world. But I could not understand them. My intellectual life was at an end. I had nothing more to understand. I knew everything I was capable of knowing, and, thenceforth, I could only play wearily with the old ideas.

MANY things happened in the world. A time came when the East and West, two mighty unified hemispheres, rose up in arms: the civil war of a planet. I recall only chaotic visions of fire and thunder and hell. It was all incomprehensible to me: like a bizarre dream, things happened, people rushed about, but I never knew what they were doing. I lurked during all that time in a tiny shuddering hole under the city of Yokohama, and by a miracle I survived. And the East won. But it seems to have mattered little who did win, for all the world had become, in all ex-

cept its few remaining prejudices, a single race, and nothing was changed when it was all rebuilt again, under a single government.

I saw the first of the strange creatures who appeared among us in the year 6371, men who were later known to be from the planet Venus. But they were repulsed, for they were savages compared with the Earthmen, although they were about equal to the people of my own century, 1900. Those of them who did not perish of the cold after the intense warmth of their world, and those who were not killed by our hands, those few returned silently home again. And I have always regretted that I had not the courage to go with them.

I watched a time when the world reached perfection in mechanics, when men could accomplish anything with a touch of the finger. Strange men, these creatures of the hundredth century, men with huge brains and tiny shriveled bodies, atrophied limbs, and slow, ponderous movements on their little conveyances. It was I, with my ancient compunctions, who shuddered when at last they put to death all the perverts, the criminals, and the insane, ridding the world of the scum for which they had no more need. It was then that I was forced to produce my tattered old papers, proving my identity

and my story. They knew it was true, in some strange fashion of theirs, and, thereafter, I was kept on exhibition as an archaic survival.

I saw the world made immortal through the new invention of a man called Kathol, who used somewhat the same method "legend" decreed had been used upon me. I observed the end of speech, of all perceptions except one, when men learned to communicate directly by thought, and to receive directly into the brain all the myriad vibrations of the universe.

All these things I saw, and more, until that time when there was no more discovery, but a Perfect World in which there was no need for anything but memory. Men ceased to count time at last. Several hundred years after the 154th Dynasty from the Last War, or, as we would have counted in my time, about 200,000 A.D., official records of time were no longer kept carefully. They fell into disuse. Men began to forget years, to forget time at all. Of what significance was time when one was immortal?

AFTER long, long uncounted centuries, a time came when the days grew noticeably colder. Slowly the winters became longer, and the summers diminished to but a month or two. Fierce

storms raged endlessly in winter, and in summer sometimes there was severe frost, sometimes there was only frost. In the high places and in the north and the sub-equatorial south, the snow came and would not go.

Men died by the thousands in the higher latitudes. New York became, after awhile, the furthest habitable city north, an arctic city, where warmth seldom penetrated. And great fields of ice began to make their way southward, grinding before them the brittle remains of civilizations, covering over relentlessly all of man's proud work.

Snow appeared in Florida and Italy one summer. In the end, snow was there always. Men left New York, Chicago, Paris, Yokohama, and everywhere they traveled by the millions southward, perishing as they went, pursued by the snow - and the cold, and that inevitable field of ice. They were feeble creatures when the Cold first came upon them, but I speak in terms of thousands of years; and they turned every weapon of science to the recovery of their physical power, for they foresaw that the only chance for survival lay in a hard, strong body. As for me, at last I had found a use for my few powers, for my physique was the finest in that world. It was but little comfort, however, for we were all united in our

awful fear of that Cold and that grinding field of Ice. All the great cities were deserted. We would catch silent, fearful glimpses of them as we sped on in our machines over the snow—great hungry, haggard skeletons of cities, shrouded in banks of snow, snow that the wind rustled through desolate streets where the cream of human life once had passed in calm security. Yet still the Ice pursued. For men had forgotten about that Last Ice Age when they ceased to reckon time, when they lost sight of the future and steeped themselves in memories. They had not remembered that a time must come when Ice would lie white and smooth over all the earth, when the sun would shine bleakly between unending intervals of dim, twilight snow and sleet.

Slowly the Ice pursued us down the earth, until all the feeble remains of civilization were gathered in Egypt and India and South America. The deserts flowered again, but the frost would come always to bite the tiny crops. For still the Ice came. All the world now, but for a narrow strip about the equator, was one great silent desolate vista of stark ice-plains, ice that brooded above the hidden ruins of cities that had endured for hundreds of thousands of years. It was terrible to imagine the awful solitude and the endless twilight

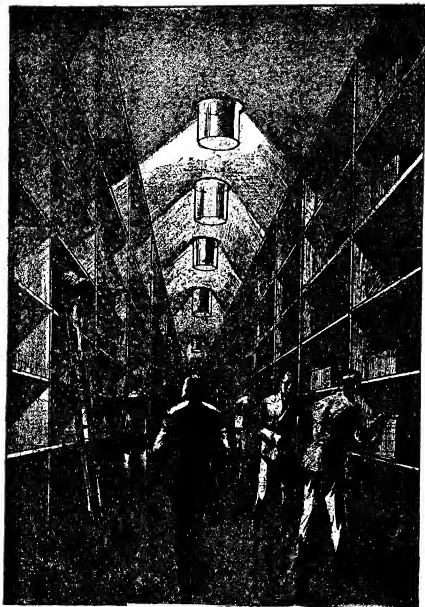
that lay on these places, and the grim snow, sailing in silence over all. . . .

It surrounded us on all sides, until life remained only in a few scattered clearings all about that equator of the globe, with an eternal fire going to hold away the hungry Ice. Perpetual winter reigned now; and we were becoming terror-stricken beasts that preyed on each other for a life already doomed. Ah, but I, I the archaic survival, I had my revenge then, with my great physique and strong jaws—God! Let me think of something else. Those men who lived upon each other—it was horrible. And I was one.

SO INEVITABLY the Ice closed in. . . . One day the men of our tiny clearing were but a score. We huddled about our dying fire of bones and stray logs. We said nothing. We just sat, in deep, wordless, thoughtless silence. We were the last outpost of Mankind.

I think suddenly something very noble must have transformed these creatures to a semblance of what they had been of old. I saw, in their eyes, the question they sent from one to another, and in every eye I saw that the answer was, Yes. With one accord they rose before my eyes and, ignoring me as a baser creature, they stripped away

(Continued on page 120)



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On every side of them, in orderly receptacles, long rows of coffin-shaped boxes were resting on shelves—so many that it made one dizzy merely to look at them.

In the Footsteps of the Wasp

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Mr. Coblentz is one of the best liked authors with whose works we have been favored. In the present story he appears in the rôle of a short story teller and very ingeniously brings everything to a happy conclusion where a whole nation is rescued from tyranny and almost extinction. We are sure that our readers will enjoy it.

Illustrated by MOREY

HAD it not been for the example of the hunting wasp, the whole extraordinary episode would never have occurred. As professor of entomology at a South American University and specialist in the ways of the hymenoptera, Dr. Andres Mandano, had given prolonged study to those wasps which, as everyone knows, are able to paralyze their victims and leave them in a state of suspended animation, so that they may eventually form succulent living morsels for still undeveloped, reviving larvae. By what leap of the imagination the professor bridged the gap from insect to human and thought of applying waspish methods to mankind, is a question that will perhaps never be answered; but at all events we know that, after years of research, he had solved the secret of the insect poison, and was able to brew it in considerable quantities and to apply it in a practical way to mankind.

In the beginning, it appears, Dr. Mandano's motives were wholly laudable; for it had been his hope to develop a new anaesthetic which would supplant ether and make it possible to perform operations without inconvenience or danger to the patient. Could he have foreseen the re-

lentless use that was to be made of his discovery, the unparalleled abuses and the vast upheavals that were to follow, probably he would promptly have hurled the formula into the ocean.

In any land other than South America of the twenty-first century, however, the formula might not have been perverted to sinister uses. But it will be recalled that a series of revolutions had but recently convulsed Dr. Mandano's home country of Peravia; that a military dictatorship had been established; and that there existed just that degree of popular subordination which made the so-called Mandana Man-Preserver a logical development. It will be recalled how public liberties had been curtailed following the rise of the revolutionary government of Rodrigo Querzal; how free speech had been eradicated, how labor unions had been destroyed, how Communists and non-conforming religious groups had been persecuted, how military demands and organizations had been strengthened, and how, finally, a compulsory sterilization decree had been adopted to cut off the progeny of undesirable elements of the population—in a word, elements opposed to Querzal.

What was more natural, accordingly,

than that the Mandano Man-Preserver be utilized as the culminating check upon the liberties of the masses?

BUT before going on to describe the actual use of the new invention, perhaps I should say a word as to its nature. It was literally what the name implies—the means of preserving men, and of preserving them over indefinite lengths of time. Not a mere method of keeping their mummified corpses! a method of keeping the men themselves in a state between sleep and death. An injection of less than one cubic centimeter of Dr. Mandano's paralyzing fluid, based on the formula learned from the wasps, would cause a man to collapse into a state of seeming lifelessness: he would cease to breathe, there would be no sign of heart action, his face would take on a waxy pallor which would show no sign of change during the course of days, weeks or even years; and yet, at any time, upon the injection of the proper antidote, he might be revived, feeling a little drowsy, like one awakened from deep slumber, but otherwise unaffected.

The secret of suspended animation, in a word, had been mastered!

But having been mastered, it was not employed, as it might have been, for humanitarian and surgical purposes. Instead, as the world in this good year 2054 is well aware, it became the nefarious tool of a political and social class.

It is not certain whether Dr. Mandano himself was involved in the misuse of his invention; or whether, beneath the iron compulsion of the Querzal dictatorship, he bent reluctantly to the will of the government and delivered over the paralyzing fluid into hands less scrupulous than his own. In any case, the result is in no doubt at all. Some evil genius, in an unlucky hour, conceived of the idea of preserving and storing the nation's excess man-power: of preserving and storing it

precisely as one would preserve and store so many hams, herrings or dill pickles. Why not build huge warehouses, he argued, where all excess human beings could be kept and filed away for reference? Why not take all beggars and vagabonds, and put them into a state of suspended animation until the dawn of a better day? Why not seize all unemployed workers and their families, and, instead of allowing them to become a burden on the community, quietly paralyze them and leave them in registered compartments, until their services should be required, when they might be immediately awakened? And why not, in the same manner, build up a vast and irresistible army? Why not train as many soldiers as possible, and then, instead of continuing to feed and quarter them, put them into a state of inexpensive paralysis until the advent of war should make them necessary? In this manner Peravia might build up a matchless military machine at a minimum of cost.

It is needless to add that these arguments, though appealing to the principles of the Querzal government and though acted upon without delay, were carefully kept from public knowledge. Indeed, it is now believed that several political offenders, who in 2034 were summarily sentenced to the noose, had been guilty of nothing beyond some inadvertent suggestions hinting at the government's new project. Browbeaten and docile as the Peravian people had long been, there was no reason to suppose that they would countenance this un-heard-of, latest atrocity of their leaders; hence none but a few high government officials, a few military chieftains, a group of medical advisers, a handful of great industrialists and Dr. Mandano himself, had any suspicion of what was in contemplation.

EVEN when the plan had actually been put into operation, the law of abso-

lute secrecy prevailed, and the government proceeded by means of ruses and subterfuges designed to throw dust into the eyes of the people. The only public pronouncement was directly misleading: that, in the interest of the public health, a State medical examination of all citizens was to be undertaken, beginning on a particular date. In the systematic manner characteristic of the Peravians, all individuals and families were to appear at various assigned times before duly constituted Boards, who were to compile the most thoroughgoing "health census" ever known to history. Little did the unsuspecting common man realize that he was being made to walk into a trap!

In a majority of cases, it is true, that the trap was not allowed to spring; merely for the sake of appearance, millions of men were put through a superfluous physical examination. But in hundreds of thousands of instances—and eventually in millions—the citizen, in his ignorance, walked to a fate he would not knowingly have accepted without a struggle.

Hence it would occasionally happen that some man—more often than not an unemployed artisan or laborer—would disappear after being summoned for examination, and would not be heard of again. Or some stout and brawny youth, who had been undergoing military training in a private or public corps, would vanish as if swallowed up by the earth; or a whole family—always of the poorer classes, and often previously dependent upon charity—would fail to return from its appointed examination, and neighbors would inquire in vain as to its whereabouts. Officials, when questioned, would merely shake their heads with a "know-nothing" expression; the police would prove either unwilling or unable to be of help; the public press, being dominated by the Querzal party, would never so much as mention any of the missing; and the rank and file of the populace, if now

and then their suspicions were aroused, would find that a word, indiscreetly uttered, would send them to a Concentration Camp if not to the executioner.

Meanwhile, in spite of the ferocious restraints of the Censorship Bureau, strange rumors were making their way through carefully guarded underground channels. Tales were told that made the hair of the listeners literally stand on end; tales that brought muttered oaths and curses to many an indignant lip, and that caused many eyes to stare in amazement or incredulity. One heard reports of intricately winding galleries which, like modern catacombs, were laden with innumerable bodies—and one was told that these were the bodies not of dead men, but of living. One heard wild stories of torture-rooms, where physicians, having stripped their unwary patients for physical examination, would slyly inject a hypodermic which caused the victims to reel over like men stricken suddenly dead. And one was assured that, by means of a carefully arranged card system, the multitudes of slumbering individuals were all placed and catalogued, each with his appropriate designation: for example, "1964 XW 2/17/34, automobile mechanic, unemployed, 25 yrs. old at time of suspended activities"; or, "4456 VT 3/11/35, trained infantryman, proficient in rifle practice, 22 yrs. old at time of S. A."; or, again, "TYU 1154, 1155 and 1156, 12/18/36, man, wife and son, dangerous radicals, 43, 37 and 13 at time of S. A."

THERE was still another report which, more ghastly than the others, was heard now and then in secluded quarters safe from the ears of government eavesdroppers. This concerned a secret incinerating chamber, where each day scores of unfortunates were brought for cremation. For Mandano's Man-Preserver, if these tales were to be believed,

did not always accomplish its purpose. Now and then some patient, either because of a weak heart or nervous shock or an excessive dose of the drug, would go beyond the stage of mere suspended animation, and the remains, consequently, would have to be disposed of as quietly as possible. But such cases, it was said, were exceptional, and caused the officials little worry; in fact, they were scarcely in excess of one per cent of the total!

But although ominous whispered reports continued to be circulated; although mysterious disappearances continued to multiply and although such cases were mostly confined to the humbler or non-possessing classes, the great majority of the citizens remained placidly unaffected. So severe was the censorship that many, perhaps, never heard the rumors at all; others, hearing them, refused to believe, or, believing, tacitly approved, since the new policy had sharply diminished the burden of unemployment and of public charity; while the majority reduced to the meekness of a jelly by the fury of political repression and well knowing the consequences of an unchecked tongue, chose not to inquire too closely into the reports.

And so the years from 2034 to 2043 slipped by and nothing had been done to restrain the use of the Man-Preserver.

But in the latter year there occurred a series of events which not even the wisest could have foreseen.

* * *

IT was in July of this year that, according to plans since disclosed, the Querzal War Department contemplated its Great Offensive. It was in July that the usefulness of Man-Preserving was to receive its culminating test; it was in July that Peravia, picking an excuse for war simultaneously with the neighboring lands of Argenzela and Bolador, was to revive millions of soldiers now waiting in a state of suspended animation, and, by

one great overwhelming sweep, was to subdue both neighboring nations. At the same time, multitudes of slumbering laborers were to be brought back to activity, so that wartime industry might be properly manned; and the nation was accordingly to have a strength beyond anything dreamed of by her enemies or indicated by her census reports.

Such was the project; and there is reason to believe that it might have succeeded—had it not been for an unexpected factor.

That unexpected factor was to be found in the person of Captain Juan Cardenzos, perhaps the most persevering foe that the Querzal regime had ever encountered.

The record of Cardenzos had been a curious one. Decorated for heroism during the Equadorian War nearly thirty years before, he had become violently anti-militant after the Armistice, he had publicly destroyed his badges and decorations, and had worked ardently in the cause of international understanding and disarmament. Following the rise of Querzal to power, he was condemned to a Concentration Camp, from which he escaped after harrowing adventures, seeking refuge in the United States, where he remained for several years. But feeling that his native country needed him, he smuggled himself back over the border, and, living the existence of a hunted creature, carried on secret propaganda at the daily risk of his life. By means of spies and underground emissaries—for he had sympathizers even in the highest circles he gradually made himself the head of a vast organized ring, the so-called League of Free Men, which, working through subterranean channels, was vowed to overthrow the reigning tyranny.

A strangely assorted group they were—disgruntled clerics, Communists, thwarted laborers, disinherited intellectuals, women disenfranchised, and adventurers ready to clutch at any straw! Yet,

though they were so motley a crowd; though they seemed to have undertaken a hopeless task, and met with discouragement after discouragement; though many of their members were seized by the police and summarily executed, they were held together by the force of their convictions and became a greater power than the authorities were able to realize. But it was Captain Cardenzos that was their guiding spirit, and he it was that set off the spark which precipitated the explosion.

EVER since its formation, the League of Free Men had been investigating rumors concerning the Man-Preserver; indeed, it was probably through members of the League that most of the rumors started. But at first its efforts had borne little fruit other than in the martyrdom of several League members by the executioner's noose. It was not until 2043 that any decisive action became possible; for it was not until that year that Cardenzos was in possession of the now-celebrated "Devil's Secrets." How the knowledge came to him—whether through spies of the League, or through betrayal of the government by its own servants—has never been disclosed; but, in any case, he did gain information of the most revealing kind, and was moved to passionate indignation by word of the impending war with Argenzela and Bolador. And, at the same time, his secret agents acquired other information which made it possible for him to plan a way to block the war, and incidentally to accomplish the avowed purpose of the League by crushing the Querzalist forever.

The never-to-be-forgotten thirtieth of July, 2043, was the date set for launching the League Revolution. One gasps even in recollection to think by what means and against what seemingly insuperable odds Cardenzos and his followers began the revolt. Their exact

numbers will never be known; but it is conservatively estimated that they were not more than five hundred in all when, on the evening of that memorable day, they quietly gathered before the gates of a huge building on the outskirts of the Capital—a building which, covering many acres with its huge squat form, bore the simple designation, "Government Warehouse." Ordinarily, armed sentries were parading before the entrance, but on this occasion they were conspicuously lacking; indeed, the gate itself, by what might have seemed a bit of official carelessness, swung invitingly ajar, and when Cardenzos and his band strode in there was no one to restrain them.

But mumbled passwords were quickly interchanged with a waiting party within; and the newcomers, as they surged through the passageway, cast casual glances at a dozen sentries strewn about them in a state of insensibility, and pressed hastily on to accomplish the night's mission.

GUIDED by maps and blueprints, they made their way through tortuously winding, electrically lighted passageways through labyrinthine corridors that not only filled the building but stretched underground in a long succession of basements; and into apartments suffused with vile-smelling concoctions reminding one of a mortuary chamber. On every side of them, in orderly receptacles, long rows of coffin-shaped boxes were resting on shelves—scores of them, hundreds, thousands, ten of thousands!—so many that it made one dizzy merely to look at them. And beneath the cellophane covering of each box one could distinguish a wax-like human face, silent and still as if in slumber.

Working according to prearranged plan, and yet filled with the fury of desperation, the rebels set about completing their victory. Several of their number

were posted at various entrances as sentinels; for the danger was not at all remote that their intrusion would be discovered, that they would be surrounded, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. Given a few hours leeway, however, and they would liberate the country. So they believed; and, firm in this conviction, several hundred of the insurrectionists drew, each drew from his pocket, little vials filled with a black fluid, and set to work over the corpse-like forms lying beneath the cellophane.

Strange beyond all words were the results. A single drop of the liquid, forced into the veins of the sleeper, would produce an almost magical effect. Instantly the patient's frame would be shaken with a convulsive shudder, his lips would draw apart in a yawn, his eyes would slowly open, and he would look up with a drowsy, bewildered expression, from which he would revive gradually into full consciousness. "Where am I?" would be his first astonished exclamation; and then, after an effort, his mind would go back to the moment of his official examination, the sudden stab of pain as the physician, taking him unawares, had injected the hyperdermic . . . and the ensuing blackness.

"Where am I?" he would repeat, in growing wonder and dread. "Who are you? . . . Where am I? . . . What has happened to me?"

"You are with friends," the League member would rapidly explain. "For years you have been sleeping, betrayed by your rulers. Now we, the servants of the people, have come to save you. We have learned the secret of your enslavement; have discovered how to make the drug that overcame you, and the antidote that has revived you. See! it is here in these little vials! Now join us! We will show you how! We have enough of the medicine to restore a million men. You must help us bring your fellows back to

life! Then we will all join forces and march upon the oppressors!"

IN some such words the League member would appeal to each reviving man. Sometimes the individual would be immediately convinced, and would enthusiastically join his saviors; sometimes he could be persuaded only with difficulty; but in every case the sight of the long, dimly lighted, sepulchral corridors, with the innumerable coffin-like boxes neatly packed on shelves in the alcoves, was enough to fill the restored person with indignation against his betrayers and with a desire to join the League.

In the course of one brief night, obviously, a few hundred unassisted workers would not have been able to revive a great many thousands of sleepers. Yet, like the proverbial snowball rolling downhill, their efforts expanded from a small nucleus until all things were swept before them. Each awakened slumberer was provided with a vial of the black fluid, by means of which he restored dozens of his fellows to life; and each of these, in turn, resurrected others, who resurrected many more: so that, before morning, the halls and corridors of the whole vast building and its underground annexes were black with great surging masses of men.

And all these great masses, newly converted to the cause of Captain Cardenzos, were loudly uttering the war-cry of the League: "Down with the oppressors! Down with the oppressors! Onward for the freedom of man! Onward, onward, onward for the freedom of man!"

* * *

THERE are several things that have never been satisfactorily explained about the epoch-making first of July, 2043. One is that Captain Cardenzos, an avowed pacifist, should have resorted to the use of arms—though it is

difficult to see how he could have prevailed unless willing to oppose force with force at the crucial juncture. Another is in what manner he succeeded in recruiting an efficient army with such unparalleled speed and securing arms and ammunition. But the second question is more easily answered than the first: for it was not really Cardenzos that recruited the army; it was his enemies that recruited it. It must be remembered that more than half the men had been trained as soldiers and intended by the Government for use in the war against Argenzela and Bolador; it must be remembered, also, that abundant weapons and uniforms were at hand in great underground armories, conveniently placed near the man-storage chambers, so as to avoid unnecessary delay in case of hostilities. And when it is recalled that the revived men, by virtue of their very numbers, could easily batter down the doors of the armories and take possession, one should have no difficulty in understanding how Captain Cardenzos, on the fateful first of July, was able to place himself at the head of so great an army.

His military experience, acquired during the War a generation before, was now to serve him well. And yet his triumph was hardly a matter of military skill. Wherever he went, he was hailed, urged on and supported by crowds of people, long groaning beneath the Querzal despotism, and long powerless to defend themselves. And wherever he went, the enemy fled like rats hounded out of their holes by terriers. Only in a few fortresses and army strongholds did they dare to defend themselves, and even there they could not long withstand the popular fury; for they were deserted by the regular army on which they had placed reliance. After one or two battles in which the masses, though ill organized, prevailed by virtue of their irresistible enthusiasm, the surviving Querzalists scur-

ried in multitudes across the national frontiers; while other multitudes were taken prisoners, or were brought down by the guns or swords of the onswEEPing Revolutionaries.

In-so-far as he could, however, Captain Cardenzos curbed all violence and bloodshed, thereby showing a self-restraint rare among victorious rebels. But he gave orders that all captives be scrupulously guarded—and the sentence that he inflicted upon them was not only unique in history but represents one of the rarest strokes of ironic justice of which we have any record. No sooner had he been established at the head of the League government, no sooner had he announced the restoration of the Peravian Republic and been elected President by an overwhelming majority, than he proposed and carried out the punishment of "Scientific Incarceration" upon all leaders of the defeated party, upon the generals and industrialists who had urged the use of the Man-Preserver, and upon the physicians who had lent their aid in paralyzing millions of unwilling victims.

BUT what, precisely, was "Scientific Incarceration"? Nothing more nor less than Man-Preserving: the paralyzing of the culprit and his preservation in a state of suspended animation. In accordance with the Presidential decree, fifty thousand men and women were condemned to this novel penalty; and all of them, undergoing a sentence of indefinite duration, were stored in those underground labyrinths where their former victims had been secreted.

And there to this day they remain. All of them, it is said, have been systematically checked, numbered, and registered in a card catalogue, so that one can easily tell in what particular box and alcove to find Señor de Mattas, one-time baron of the armament makers; or General Fernandez de Leon, who planned the never-to-be-

consummated campaign; or Chancellor Manuel Carranza, long regarded as the "iron man" of the Querzalist regime; or Dr. Andres Mandano, who, on general principles, was sentenced to taste the effects of his own invention.

For eleven years already these notables and many others have been quietly slumbering where they will never do damage

to any human being. And it is believed that they may be left undisturbed for another hundred years, or perhaps even for a thousand, since the Cardenzos regime is still ruling successfully, and no one has any further desire to experiment with the Man-Preserver or to revive any persons who know too much of its dread secrets.

THE END.

(Continued from page 111)

their load of tattered rags and, one by one, they stalked with their tiny shrivelled limbs into the shivering gale of swirling, gusting snow, and disappeared. And I was alone. . . .

So am I alone now. I have written this last fantastic history of myself and of Mankind upon a substance that will, I know, outlast even the snow and the Ice—as it has outlasted Mankind that made it. It is the only thing with which I have never parted. For is it not irony that I should be the historian of this race—I, a savage, an "archaic survival?" Why do I write? God knows, but some instinct prompts me, although there will never be men to read.

I have been sitting here, waiting, and I have thought often of Sir John and Alice, whom I loved. Can it be that I am feeling again, after all these ages, some tiny portion of that emotion, that great passion I once knew? I see her face before me, the face I

have lost from my thoughts for eons, and something is in it that stirs my blood again. Her eyes are half-closed and deep, her lips are parted as though I could crush them with an infinity of wonder and discovery. O God! It is love again, love that I thought was lost! They have often smiled upon me when I spoke of God, and muttered about my foolish, primitive superstitions. But they are gone, and I am left who believe in God, and surely there is purpose in it.

I am cold, I have written. Ah, I am frozen. My breath freezes as it mingles with the air, and I can hardly move my numbed fingers. The Ice is closing over me, and I cannot break it any longer. The storm cries wierdly all about me in the twilight, and I know this is the end. The end of the world. And I—I, the last man. . . .

The last man. . . .

. . . I am cold—cold. . . .

But is it you, Alice, Is it you?

THE END

Shot Into Space

By ISAAC R. NATHANSON

This is a very interesting story of what might happen in the future to a high-speed rocket plane. A runaway horse is really a pretty serious thing in many cases, but he covers his mile at a mere fraction of the rate of a rocket plane, and this story tells us the adventures of some brave men who were rocketed off into space.

Illustrated by MOREY

ROOSEVELT FIELD was a scene of buzzing excitement. A vast multitude had gathered to witness the daring pioneers take off in their new rocket-plane on the widely heralded flight to "Europe in three hours."

From all sides they came; on foot and by motor, by train, by airplane and every other conveyance; crowding the highways and byways and every approach to the famous landing-field, eager and curious to be on hand for the epochal event. An army of guards were heroically battling to keep the turbulent masses from over-running the entire field. Itching fingers, idle hands were with difficulty kept at a proper distance from the precious plane.

Three hours to Europe! A combination rocket-plane under full control, that was to cleave through the rarified atmosphere twenty to fifty miles above the earth's surface at unheard of speed!

It had never been tried before. Could they do it? Would they burst to pieces? Would they land alive? On every hand doubts and wonder were freely expressed; the tense excitement attaining a high pitch, as the moment for the great take-off drew near.

At one end of the field, carefully cleared of all obstructions, rested the

Meteor, her shining wings proudly poised like some huge bird ready for flight; on her glistening sides emblazoned the confident legend, "*America to Europe in Three Hours.*" Near the entrance stood the two men who were about to make history: Joshua Malcolm, inventor and pilot of the *Meteor*, and his aid and co-pilot, Edward King.

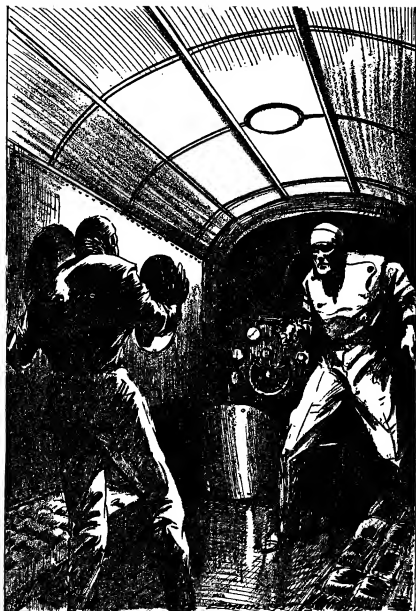
The great moment had arrived; everything was in readiness. With a wave of the hand to the expectant multitude, the brave aviators stepped inside and closed the hermetically sealed entrance to the double-shelled body. The faint hum of the air-conditioning machinery inside could be heard; the two aviators at the controls were visible through the quartzite ports. A strange silence fell on the immense multitude.

At the signal, the propellers began to spin. The *Meteor* moved forward, gathered momentum, took off lightly as a feather; and, engines roaring, sailed away.

A thousand feet up and rising steadily, her stern rocket tubes suddenly flared. Up, up and away the *Meteor* shot, leaving behind a long blazing trail from her fiery rockets; and soon disappeared into the azure deeps of the sky.

Fifty miles up, the powerful liquid

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propellant, hissing from the rocket tubes with explosive force, was driving the vessel toward its goal in distant France at a speed of upwards of twelve hundred miles per hour. Soon they were far out over the billowing Atlantic; the steady thrust of their rocket tubes speeding them on and on, higher and faster than any human being had ever gone before.

They had been on the way half an hour, Josh Malcolm and Ed King, as they sat at the controls, thrilling at their success so far. Inside their vessel everything was perfectly comfortable; the means for controlling the air pressure and temperature necessary to withstand the conditions which obtain at such extreme heights were operating perfectly.

Suddenly a frightful explosion shook the machine. As if some giant hand had all at once picked them up, they felt themselves hurled forward like a shot. The two men were thrown headlong, stunned into blank unconsciousness.

FOR a long time they were totally oblivious to all that was transpiring. Had an observer been present, he would have thought both had been killed by the sudden shock.

Josh Malcolm was the first to come to his senses. Dazedly he stirred and looked about him out of blood-shot eyes. A fearful bump showed on his forehead. Blood was oozing from an ugly gash in the scalp, head aching abominably, an excruciating pain in his right shoulder. He found it hard to collect his thoughts, and strove to rise, but fell back with a groan.

Gradually his senses came back; he remembered. He sat up, supporting himself unsteadily and looked around. Heaven, what had happened! Everything inside the *Meteor* seemed as before. His eyes roved to where Ed King was lying all in a heap, still unconscious—or dead. To Malcolm's dazed senses, the position

in which the other lay struck him as ludicrous in the extreme; face turned sideways on the floor, knees grotesquely drawn up under him; his position against the corner of the wall preventing him from rolling over. A pool of blood trickled on the floor.

Collecting himself, Josh tried to walk toward his fallen comrade; felt himself queerly light, swayed dizzily and fell featherlike to the floor. Everything was swimming and turning. Yet, oddly enough, he had a sensation of utter calm and rest, as if they had landed somewhere.

He closed his eyes for a few moments; then, feeling better, raised himself to a sitting position and looked around. He was strangely puzzled by what greeted his eyes. Outside, the sky was a dead black, brilliantly studded with stars that blazed as he had never seen them blaze before. And yet—and this puzzled him the more—brilliant sunshine was streaming in through the quartz-glass ports on the starboard side. Otherwise, outside of the soft purring of the air-conditioning machinery, everything was quiet as a tomb.

Still puzzled, and wondering whether he was still in the flesh or only in the spirit, he made his way unsteadily, with a feeling of utter weightlessness, to where his companion lay. Ed was breathing. From a frightful gash on his head and from battered mouth, blood was flowing. Quickly as he could Josh stanching the flow. The unconscious man slowly revived, his eyes rolling wildly with pain and fright.

Presently with clearing minds, they took stock of themselves. Both were still weak and dizzy from the shock and loss of blood; but otherwise they suffered from no broken bones nor serious injury.

Upon looking out of the ports, they beheld an amazing sight. Aft of the *Meteor*, looming indescribably large, was

a brilliant globe, many times larger than the full moon; the wanly shining lunar orb by its side dwarfed and paled into insignificance by the size and brilliancy of the larger globe. In unbelieving amazement they stood and gazed on the wonderful spectacle; the truth beginning to dawn on their surprised senses.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Josh Malcolm; "it looks as if we have shot away from the earth altogether!"

A STRANGE unlooked for thing had happened indeed. Something had gone wrong, causing an enormous amount of the liquid propellant to explode all in one charge instead of firing steadily and under control, hurling the speeding *Meteor* far out into space away from the earth. The terrific force of the explosion tore away a large portion of the stern, including some of the rocket tubes, but fortunately leaving intact the air-tight cabin and other vital parts.

Experienced scientist and navigator that he was, it did not take Josh Malcolm very long to calculate within fairly close limits, their true position in space, and whither they were going—and they were not heading for the earth!

"Well—?" questioningly from Ed King, who stood near, as the other pushed back the sheets of paper on which he had just completed a long series of mathematical calculations. "How do we stand?"

Josh looked up, stared steadily at his companion, a serious expression in his dark brown eyes, seemingly hesitant about speaking his thoughts.

"Well, what have you figured out?" Ed spoke up impatiently; "are we on the way to Heaven, or—?"

"Ed, I'm afraid we're in for it. I'm loth to tell you where we are going; but we're not bound for our world. In fact, we're not going anywhere in particular—just going."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we are in His hands—God help us."

Ed stared at Josh in an uncomprehending manner, a look of terror gradually bulging his eyes wide open.

"We are now about thirty thousand miles from the earth," explained Josh to his terrified companion, "and still receding with the rate due to an initial velocity of 6.95 miles per second. As near as I can figure out, the sudden explosion of an enormous amount of the liquid propellant, coming just as we were already moving through the vacuous atmosphere at twelve hundred miles an hour clip, shot up far out into space. Lucky we weren't killed outright—perhaps unlucky," he added gloomily. "A trifle larger explosion, or at the rate of 6.98 miles per second, and we should have left the gravitational pull of the earth forever—although we are just as bad off either way. The *Meteor* is now a satellite of the earth—at least for a time."

"But isn't there some way we may guide her back to the earth?" came croakingly from Ed, who seemed to shrink within himself.

Josh shook his head mournfully. "None that I can see. This vessel was not designed for that purpose. If I start the rocket tubes again we'll only shoot along faster, and leave the earth altogether. At present I can see no way to change our line of movement."

The expression of wild terror in Ed's countenance heightened, and he turned away. "God, but I'm thirsty," he exclaimed presently; "I must have a drink."

"Wait, Ed; go slow," Josh cried, jumping up excitedly; the effort bouncing him clear to the ceiling, from which he fell slow-motion-like, back to the floor, bewildered and surprised at his inability to control his motions. "You know our supply is very limited. We've got to conserve, or——"

"I DON'T give a damn—the sooner I over with it the better. Besides I'm terribly thirsty and I've got to have a drink." He looked belligerently at his companion.

"Well, you know what I mean, Ed. I realize you're thirsty after your loss of blood; and so am I. But we must ration our supply sensibly. Otherwise——" with this, Josh with some difficulty got between Ed and the all too mournfully small container. Carefully he drew a small quantity of the precious fluid and handed it to Ed, who drank eagerly. Josh drew an equally small portion and drank himself.

Then they ruefully examined their all too meager larder. Not counting on an extended trip, they had taken along a limited quantity of food. In fact, Ed had thought it foolish to take along anything but a few sandwiches at the most. But Josh, who was of an extremely provident nature, had decided it prudent, in the possibility of a forced landing, to take along a small supply of food and water.

A careful analysis of their dreadful situation disclosed that, with extreme husbanding, they had food for a few days, water for only about a week, and, providing nothing went wrong with the air-conditioning machinery, enough air and reserve oxygen to last twelve days at the very outside!

FARTHER and farther from the planet circled the two unfortunate men in their craft, their little world an infinitesimal speck in the immensities of space.

For days it had now been going on; the same cramped life, the same dreadful doom clutching at their hearts. To the despairing aviators it seemed that they were besieged—the mighty power of the infinite outside grimly waiting for their end.

The huge ball of the earth, gradually

shrinking in size, hung in the dark depths of space; so tantalizingly near it seemed. It loomed big and beautiful, the ever changing outlines on its surface appearing, disappearing; now becoming sharp, here and there hazy and melting. The smaller ball of the moon seemed pale and insignificant beside the kaleidoscopic aspect of the brilliantly colorful primary.

But the two doomed pioneers now had no eye nor thought for the magnificent spectacle thus vouchsafed to no other living men. Hunger and thirst were tearing at their vitals. Stark fear and lingering death within: pitiless, cold space without.

Of the two, Josh Malcolm was holding out better, as men of stronger mind and nerve usually do. He took the dreadful predicament with remarkable stoicism. The other, however, was becoming increasingly restless; stark terror stamping him with its indelible mark.

Carefully and meticulously Josh rationed out their dreadfully fast dwindling supply of food and water; the while his companion watched his every move with jealous eyes. Morsel by morsel, drop by drop; the tiniest crumb carefully retrieved, their tongues licking the smallest drop.

"I can't stand this confounded thirst any longer," Ed exclaimed often and again, an insane look in his eyes.

More than once Josh forcibly had to restrain the thirst-maddened man from draining the pitifully limited supply still on hand. At times they came near to blows. Josh slept fitfully with one eye literally open, the precious remainder of food and water at his side. More than once he barely prevented the other from helping himself while he slept, awakening just in time to frustrate Ed's selfish attempt. The last time he was forced to strike the maddened man a sharp blow on the face to cause him to desist; and a fight was narrowly averted.

"We might as well eat and drink what is left," Ed said, "and end it all the sooner. I can't stand it."

To these demands Josh was adamant. His was the type of character that holds out unflinchingly to the end, never giving up. He continued a close watch on his companion.

Interminably the long minutes and the hours dragged by: each minute a day; each hour a year. Would the end never come?

THREE days since their last crumb had been consumed. They were famished and weak from hunger. A few small rations of water still remained to them, and when that was gone . . . Already they were drawing on their last reserve of compressed air and oxygen. The air inside was none too pure.

Every plan of forcing their living tomb earthward was futile; in fact there was no way for them to do so. They had no equipment even for going outside—no such contingency had been counted on by the inventor. The end now could not be far off.

Josh still kept up his daily observations, doggedly making calculations. He found that the radial velocity of the *Meteor* was gradually diminishing to zero; by this time having receded to about 300,000 miles from the earth—fortunately in a direction away from the orbit of the moon.

Then one day, as days were counted by his chronometer, his face lightened up. Eagerly he went over his equations.

"Ed, he shouted joyfully, "we are drawing closer to the earth."

Ed stirred himself from his torpor; advanced eagerly toward Josh. "Are you sure, are you sure?" His hands opened and closed spasmodically.

And then, after a further look at his calculations, Josh's face fell in hopeless dejection. "I'm sorry to have raised

false hopes, Ed," he spoke sadly; "but I guess I rejoiced too soon. I find that though our centrifugal force is not equal to the gravitational pull of the earth, and though as a consequence we are now beginning to fall back to it—I fear too slowly to save us. It will take about a week before we approach the upper atmosphere, close enough for our wings to take hold and maneuver a landing. By that time . . . I don't think we shall be alive."

It was true. At first imperceptibly, then at an accelerating rate, the *Meteor* was drawing closer and closer to the earth. The initial momentum of its radial component was exhausted. Gravitation was now forcing it earthward; at first slowly, then faster and faster; until it would approach the planet with the same velocity of 6.95 miles per second with which it departed.

Josh took careful stock of their remaining few drinks of water and small supply of air. "Only enough air for five days at the most, Ed. We may last without food—but the water and air . . . Not enough for two. We are doomed!"

"You mean—our present supply is just enough for—for—that one could survive?"

Josh nodded. "I think so."

"But no chance for the two of us?"

The other shook his head negatively. Silently he turned to one of the ports and stood staring long and hopelessly at the pitiless emptiness without.

He heard a movement behind him, and wheeled around.

"I'VE just got to have a drink of that water."

"Not time yet, Ed; in three hours."

"But I tell you I must have a drink."

"In three hours we shall each take two swallows. For God's sake, Ed, keep your senses."

"Well then, let's toss up: it's either you

or I. There is not enough air and water for two; that would give one of us at least a chance to come through." And he looked craftily at Josh, greed and mad cunning playing on his features. "Let's draw; and whoever loses can put himself out with your automatic. I'd rather die than go on any longer where there is no hope."

Josh shook his head. "I'll not commit murder or suicide. It's share and share alike to the last drop and the last breath."

"You're a fool and a coward," hissed Ed.

Josh refrained from answering, and turned to look out of the window port.

Suddenly Ed threw himself upon him and snatched at his automatic, the only firearm in their possession, which Josh had been guarding carefully. They grappled and, both being etherially light and unsteady of foot, fell to the floor. In the struggle which ensued, Josh wrenched the automatic from the other's hand, and it fell like a feather to the floor out of the reach of either.

Weak though both were, they battled with frenzied energy, each striving to pick up the fallen weapon. They were about evenly matched for weight and strength. Josh drove a hard right at Ed, who dodged the blow which was absurdly ineffective due to their lack of weight, causing the former, however, to slip to one knee. In a flash the other leaped for the automatic, but was tripped headlong as Josh entwined his arms football fashion around the frenzied man's legs.

Over and over the two men rolled, bouncing, cursing and yelling, striving for mastery. The none too fresh air made them gasp for breath. Their struggle was a tragi-comedy-farce, ludicrous in the extreme; for at their distance from the earth they were practically weightless, their weight being only about 1/5800 as much as at its surface. They jumped and bounced and floated about this way and

that, locked in each other's arms; their mightiest blows landing feather-like, their quickest motions ridiculously slow. It was like some silly dream, without control or effectiveness. In their ineffectual struggles Ed happened to bounce clear to the other end of the cabin, and Josh retrieved the automatic.

Ed rose slowly to his feet, eyes blood-shot, features distorted with meanness. Slowly he backed away and stood in the corner of the cabin, cowed into furious submission by the levelled automatic in the hands of his companion, who was facing him with set jaw and glinting eye.

"Stand still and don't move, Ed; or, by Heaven, so long as you are determined that one of us shall pass out—you will be the one. You're a dastardly coward, a treacherous hyena. For shame: I thought you were a man!"

Ed cowered sullenly, somewhat brought to his senses. "Oh, all right; have it your way. Soon we'll see each other in hell anyway."

"Yes, I *will* have my way. The least we can do in our terrible circumstance is to die like men, not like wolves. And now let us understand each other: At the least sign of treachery on your part again, I'll not hesitate, but shall shoot to kill."

FROM then on it became a strange contest, almost a curious form of siege. The two men kept a wary eye on each other, speaking but little, coming near only when it was time for Josh to pass out the scanty swallow or two of water. Ed would gulp his portion; then greedily look on as Josh slowly sipped his own portion, allowing the precious liquid to trickle slowly drop by drop past his swollen lips into his parched system.

The lack of sufficient food and water was telling heavily. Their mouths and throats were leathery and burning dry. To speak even was an effort. Faces were

gaunt and drawn; bodies thin and weak from hunger and thirst.

At times, and with increasing frequency, Josh himself felt that something within him must snap. Often he caught himself slipping into momentary lapses of consciousness, only to arouse himself with a jerk.

For he could not trust the slowly gathering insanity of the man before him. In their desperate plight the true character of the other was showing itself—his selfishness, his greed and ruthlessness. One never knows what lurks in a man until put to the test.

That Ed King was determined to survive if possible at his expense Josh now knew only too well. Except when asleep or in a stupor, the half insane man watched Josh's every move, never taking his eyes off him, although pretending to appear disinterested. Full well Josh knew that even if he did agree by lot as to who should remain alive with the last of their water and air, the other would not abide by the draw.

As things stood their situation was absolutely hopeless. If only they had provided themselves with a slightly larger supply of water and oxygen, just a few more days supply—foolish if—there would have been strong hope for both of them. But now, a horrible death for the two was inescapable, days ere their craft crashed to the earth with no one alive to control its downward plunge—unless—unless one or the other. . . .

Horrible thought! He could not bear it. His fibre was not made of that stuff. Countless of his forebears, long since gone and forgotten, had died for their comrades and for each other, for their country, for a cause. Into his innermost nature heroism had been burned on many a battlefield. He could not turn coward now.

And yet, life was sweet. He was so young. He hated to die thus. What had

he done to deserve such a horrible fate! All his hopes and ambitions, all the wonderful things he had planned to do, to enjoy. He looked down at his feet, his legs; he studied his fingers, his hands; felt of his chest, his face—what precious things they were. And now, he would soon be forced to give up his body, so full of life and vibrant desire.

ED sat sullenly on the opposite side, mumbling and cursing to himself. Josh, too, was too weak to do more than sit and hope—hope for what! What miracle could happen!

Perhaps he was a fool. Perhaps . . . he ought to save himself, the only last desperate thing to do. Had he not always heard it said that self-preservation is the first law of nature? Assuredly the other would not hesitate a moment if the automatic were in his hand! Why not? Did not the other, by his very act of treachery, forfeit his life?—he, himself win the right to live? Was it wrong under the circumstance?—what would the world have to say about it? what would anybody else do if he were in his place? Or was he a fool to save his soul and lose his life!

Confusedly his tortured mind spun round and round the treadmill of his thoughts; his soul bitter as gall, his heart full of rebellion at his terrible fate.

No! He could not do it. The instinct of self-sacrifice and mutual aid, developed through the ages, and which had made man great, setting him above the beasts, was very strong in him, stronger than the instincts of the tiger and the wolf. He would not purchase his life at the expense of another's! He would die like a man!

HE was very weak and tired. He dared not allow himself the recuperative powers of undisturbed sleep. In that he was much worse off than his companion who perforce slept more than

he. Josh had to snatch his sleep in fitful dozes, automatic always in hand, weakened senses on edge.

During his dozes he dreamed a great deal. Always he was drinking great drafts of cold water, breathing deeply of fresh air, or feasting luxuriously. He dreamed he was at home. Through the open windows, looking out on their beautiful garden, delightful breezes blew, wafting to his nostrils the sweet smell of green and growing things. In front of him, piled high, was a table full of food, the huge pile on his own plate seemingly growing bigger as he gorged and gorged, his wife urging him to eat, saying there was plenty more. And at his side was a tall goblet of sparkling water which he emptied continuously, yet somehow never seemed to have enough.

Something made him open his eyes, he knew not what. He had forgotten himself, had fallen asleep. Over him, looming huge and gigantic to his startled senses, stood King, hand upraised, clutching a large wrench, ready to strike.

Instinctively he ducked, and received a blow on the shoulder. Before his enemy could deliver another blow, he grappled with him, striving to pull his automatic; but the other was too quick for him, and prevented him from firing. Arms wound around each other, they began to enact the same tragi-farical dance; Ed struggling to free his right arm which held the wrench, the other striving to employ his firearm.

Josh fought desperately with the frenzied half-mad King, who kicked and clawed and gouged and bit. In their struggles the automatic was discharged; a stream of bullets pierced the madman's body.

Josh tore himself loose. His enemy lay quite still. He never regained consciousness.

Exhausted from the desperate struggle for his life, and weak from lack of nour-

ishment, Josh lay down and fell into a long needed sleep.

ALONE in his silent tomb. A motionless figure, the upper part of his lifeless body and his face covered, was outside, moving with the *Meteor*. Poor Ed. From the sunward side, the fierce rays of the sun illumined every nook and cranny of the interior; oddly enough it seemed, for the brilliantly star-studded blackness of space showed against the ports.

Inside, the air was close and fetid, although, thanks to the radiant energy of the sun, comfortably warm. He was on his last reserve of compressed air and oxygen.

Two days since his swollen dry lips had drained the very ultimate, last drop of water. Not a bit of food had passed his mouth for over a week. Yet this he did not mind so much. But that dreadful thirst! Sometimes he was tempted to open the outer exit and let the intruding cold end it all in merciful instantaneity.

Two days yet ere the *Meteor* would reach the outermost molecules of the earth's atmosphere. He must husband his fast-ebbing strength; felt he could hold out if only the air would last that long. He knew that when his vessel began rushing through the outer confines of the vacuous atmosphere, he must have sufficient strength to start the motors, must guide the craft safely to solid land—must not allow too swift a rush through the heavier layers of air to prevent burning up like a meteor. His great velocity must be retarded slowly, gradually, while still scores of miles up.

He husbanded every ounce of his strength, lying perfectly still most of the time to conserve the vitiated air. Now and then he continued his observations. The *Meteor* was now approaching the earth on a fast in-running spiral. The

huge body of the planet now filled more than a quarter of the sky. Soon, soon, the crucial process of landing would tax his knowledge and skill.

WHILE still miles above the surface, he had started the engines—a supreme effort for his lone and wasted strength. But they were now going; the propellers spinning.

He made ready in plenty of time. The very sound and feel of the throbbing motors was like sweet music to his ears, a sweet caress to his tortured nerves.

Not a drop of water for nearly four days. He was gasping for the air, which was now almost unbreathable. Any unlooked for delay in landing would be fatal.

Summoning all his remaining reserve of strength through sheer power of will, he stood tense at the controls. Underneath, the surface of the earth loomed welcomingly, immense and wide, bathed in brilliant sunshine. He could make out no details even with his glass. Everything was completely obscured by a vast storm-area; the outside of the cloud banks reflecting the dazzling rays of the sun.

He was moving through the silence with frightful speed. Any moment he would begin to feel the retarding pressure of the outposts of the planet's atmosphere. He must be careful . . . careful . . . descend lower slowly, when resistance against the body and wings shall have reduced his terrific velocity to within safe limits; then proceed under his own controlled power to a safe landing place . . . life and happiness. . . .

At last he began to feel the cushioning effect of the resisting atmosphere. Moving as he was at the residual enormous velocity, the wings of the *Meteor* met sufficient resistance, even in the all but empty space, to control his rate of descent. As the friction against the body

and wings gradually reduced his velocity, he allowed the vessel to settle lower and lower.

Slowly he settled; still going at five thousand miles an hour—three thousand—two thousand—steadily decreasing. Lower and lower, slower and slower; the now cloudless vistas beneath drawing near. Thank God!

He was over land; too weak and dizzy to care where; anywhere so it was a safe place to land. Green fields, trees, roofs of houses, the landscape melting and swimming before his eyes. His knees sagged. . . . Ah, a large open field. He must land—land. . . .

A heavy thud. As if in a dream he felt the *Meteor* bump along the ground and come to rest . . . blessed land!

He felt himself going. With his last remaining strength he reeled drunkenly to the exit. With his last shred of will he unsealed the locks—shouts, voices . . . funny; things were getting dark . . . the floor rising toward him. . . .

A STRANGE face was bending over him; two faces—no, several. Who were these people? What was he doing in that bed?

He heard murmuring voices. Funny—he could not understand a word; such odd words. He turned his head and looked around. White room; white clothes—where in the devil was he!

Someone was holding his hand, feeling his wrist. A pleasant-faced man, with a closely cropped beard, was leaning over him, talking with such senseless-sounding words in a strange language.

He closed his eyes; inhaled deeply of the blessed air; luxuriated in the sweet-smelling sheets. He opened his eyes again: the smiling face of a white-clad girl; a glass tube at his lips—cooling water . . . he sucked greedily.

He was in Holland, after thirteen days and twenty-one hours in space.

THE END.

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